



An Object of Beauty

STEVE MARTIN

Works of fiction can offer as much insight and truth about art as can be found in an artist's biography or a work of art history. We not only get a deep, emotional feel for the subject through the novel's narrative, we can be inspired to explore the subject further. In this unique reading guide for Steve Martin's art novel An Object of Beauty, rather than ask questions about the world within the book, we look for and follow the points of departure it suggests. For book groups, we suggest reading Martin's book and then discussing and determining together where you'd like to go from there. Here are our suggestions along with the passages in the book that inspired them:

ART AUCTIONS

The Art of the Steal: Inside the Sotheby's-Christie's Auction House Scandal, Christopher Mason

"And so Lacey joined the spice rack of girls at Sotheby's. Sotheby's and Christie's, the two premier auction houses in New York, drew young, crisp talent from Harvard and its look-alikes.... The auction houses seemed not as dull as their financial counterparts on Wall Street, where parents of daughters imagined glass ceilings and bottom patting. Sotheby's was an institution that implied European accents and grand thoughts about art and aesthetics coexisting with old and new money in sharp suits and silk ties." (p. 7, hardcover edition)

MILTON AVERY

Milton Avery Papers, 1926-1982 (Smithsonian Archives of American Art)
www.aaa.si.edu/collections/online/avermilt
especially *Tribute to Milton Avery, January 7, 1965*, Mark Rothko

"Milton Avery was an isolated figure in American painting, not falling neatly into any category.... His pictures were always polite, but they were polite in the way that a man with a gun might be polite: there was plenty to back up his request for attention." (p. 23)

THE HERMITAGE, ST. PETERSBURG

The Hermitage: The Biography of a Great Museum, Geraldine Norman

"Even though the corridor had layers of green paint that reminded Lacey of her high school cafeteria, the oak wainscoting and interior doors had a mellow patina that spoke of history. They were led up a small staircase that opened onto a stairway of renown: wide, hushed, and grand. Then they stepped into the first room of paintings." (p. 83)

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Louise Hall Tharp

"Isabella Stewart Gardner was a grand dame terrible of late-nineteenth-century Boston who inherited an inexhaustible fortune and spent as much as she could on art." (p. 124)

The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World's Largest Unsolved Art Theft, Ulrich Boser

"Look at these pictures.' She stabbed her finger at each one. 'Stolen. Stolen. Stolen...'

"Oh yes, I remember that. A tragedy.'

"Rembrandt. Degas. Manet. Vermeer... ' Lacey stopped her finger on the Vermeer, and her expression changed to quizzical.

"What?' said Patrice.

"I've seen this somewhere.'

"It's a famous painting.'

"No, I've seen this, recently, I think. Where did I see it?'" (136)

ANDY WARHOL, COLLECTING AND SELLING

I Bought Andy Warhol, Richard Polsky

“The flower picture had piqued her interest, and the next day she slipped out of her office, five minutes at a time, to thumb through the library, turning page after page of Warhols, until her desire for the picture had risen to overflowing.... After some haggling, she bought the picture for sixteen thousand dollars.” (p. 103)

I Sold Andy Warhol (Too Soon), Richard Polsky

“In the spring of 2001, Lacey took her beloved Warhol Flowers and auctioned it at Christie’s ... Whatever heartache she felt at selling the painting was soothed by the stunning check she received after it brought a warming one hundred and twenty-nine thousand dollars. Warhol was on the move, and so was she.” (p. 210)

GALLERIES AND GIRLS

The Girl with the Gallery, Lindsay Pollack

“... to sit in the middle of her still-unhung gallery and contemplate the potential of its blank walls.” (p. 212)

JOHN RICHARDSON

Sacred Monsters, Sacred Masters: Beaton, Capote, Dalí, Picasso, Freud, Warhol, and More and A Life of Picasso, vols 1-3, John Richardson

“Richardson, a real scholar with a bright pen, was a renowned biographer of Picasso ... what I really wanted was for him to simply tell me his writing secret. Unfortunately, I already knew it: brilliance.” (p. 219)

ART BASEL MIAMI

Annual Fair Coverage by *The Art Newspaper*
www.theartnewspaper.com/fairs

“... I landed in Miami for the big mutha expo of galleries from all over the world, or at least countries that participated in the art market.... the expo teemed with galleries, some of them so upscale that their booths were covered in brown velvet and had paneled ceilings, and some so slapdash that they could have been selling tattoos and moonshine.” (p. 229)

PETER SCHJELDAHL

Let’s See: Writings on Art from The New Yorker, Peter Schjeldahl

“Schjeldahl, now that the conversation had turned to art and not money, finally spoke: “All the cocksure movements of the last century have collapsed into a bewildering, trackless here and now.

“The table went silent, then the chatter resumed at the same tempo as after a distant gunshot.” (p. 239)