

## Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Critical Kitaj: Essays on the Work of R. B. Kitaj* by James Aulich, John Lynch and R. B. Kitaj

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the-world' as understood within a particular historical society.

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**Eduardo Paolozzi. Writings and Interviews.** Edited by Robin Spencer. 392 pp. incl. 12 col. pls. + numerous b. & w. ills. (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000), £60. ISBN 0-19-817412-8.

Although this book is thick and square, it seems miraculous that it should be of sufficient size to contain the baroque cornucopia, the dyslectic lava flow of Paolozzi's writings and interviews which have poured forth since 1947. Robin Spencer has succeeded in ordering them into nine chapters, running chronologically through the artist's life. The material includes important letters, poems, parts of a 'ready made' novel, notes for teaching, an unfiled film script, and interviews, one of which is a spoof. There are 117 entries, each numbered, given its source, dated and briefly commented on by Spencer. Topics include the artist's childhood in Edinburgh, with holidays at Fascist youth camps on the Adriatic; his inspirational years in Paris from 1947-49; his involvement with the Independent Group in London in the early 1950s; his concern with Wittgenstein's writings; his print making and fabricated sculptures; his iconography; and his recent figurative, bronze, 'social' sculptures. The chapters are preceded by a thoughtful introduction by Spencer and followed by a full chronology which incorporates a wealth of new information. There are also appendices, a bibliography listing all Paolozzi's published writings between 1954 and 2000 and an extensive index. There are many carefully chosen reproductions placed relevantly through the text but it is regrettable that the only works reproduced in colour are the set of screen prints *As Is When* of 1965.

Although Paolozzi's career spans over fifty years and his art has changed markedly from the Dubuffet-influenced lost-wax bronzes of the 1950s, through the fabricated gun metal or aluminium pieces of the 1960s and 1970s, to the more recent massive figurative sculptures suggested by his study of classical art in Munich, consistent ideas emerge. For him 'all human experience is one big collage' and the idea of collage is crucial to his writings and his art. His early years in Paris were formative and he has remained a true Surrealist, indebted to Jarry and Roussel, Tzara, Breton, and Giacometti. Perhaps most important was Ozenfant's book *Foundations of Modern Art* (discovered by happy chance in Buxton Public Library during Paolozzi's military service), with its heady mixture of reproductions drawn from machinery, the natural world, Parisian avant-garde art and 'primitive' art from all over the world.

Chance encounters, randomness, disjunctions, irony, nostalgia, allusion and metaphor, the absurd and the comic, are Paolozzi's weapons. Despite the fame of his 'Bunk' collages of the early 1950s, he stress-

es that he is not a 'Pop' artist. He wishes to convey the horror of existence, the weirdness of man's imagination, his extraordinary ability to misapply his inventiveness. Much of Paolozzi's imagery is to do with war: 'JET ENGINES WITH GREEK PAGAN GOD NAMES'. In this way, his ideas are more akin to those of his friend J.G. Ballard than to, say, Warhol. Paolozzi's attitude to the United States and its art is ambivalent, even hostile. He remains a European though he feels an outsider, a Scot of Italian descent, based in London but often working abroad.

Perhaps to accompany his rootlessness, he has collected ephemera since childhood - old Sci-Fi magazines, toys, cast-offs from skips. These *objets trouvés* are stored, reproduced in a variety of techniques, recycled to emerge far from their origins. For example, a grainy reproduction of an obscure German abstract painting of the 1920s, representing organ music, found in a Hamburg second-hand book shop, becomes the source for relief panels made for the ceiling of a Scottish castle. Vast quantities of these found treasures are squirrelled away, in the Crazy Kat Archive in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in the Tate (sixty-six uncatalogued boxes), or the Dean Gallery, Edinburgh (over 3000 items). Robin Spencer's paper-chase began with a suitcase of such ephemera in 1973.

Paolozzi emerges from this collection as self-centred, like most artists, and at the same time immensely generous, prodigal in his gifts. His poetry is hardly on a par with that of the great sculptor-poets such as Arp but his imagery is stimulating, his juxtapositions of found texts startling, his spelling liberated. Here is an example picked at hazard:

Free assosassational  
random collected pre-selected  
pre-helatik  
post-censored  
pro welded images  
chipped work pristine  
wandering  
more problems  
one artificial.

Wisely, Spencer has almost avoided the use of the word *sic* anywhere in this marvellous book - a collection that is an essential tool in understanding the work of one of Britain's greatest sculptors.

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**Critical Kitaj: Essays on the work of R.B. Kitaj.** Edited by James Aulich and John Lynch. 249 pp. incl. 16 col. pls. + 40 b. & w. ills. (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), £45 (HB), ISBN 0-7190-5525-3; £17.99 (PB), ISBN 0-7190-5526-1.

This book consists of substantial essays by ten writers and the editors' introduction provides an important eleventh. Though the title might suggest a negative assessment of Kitaj's art and aims, this is the case with

only one of the eleven texts. Despite uniform resistance to restriction by Kitaj's own account of his works, the remaining writers find his art compelling. Taken as a whole, the book is testimony to the power of Kitaj's vision and expression. Even without the numerous illustrations, a reader who stumbled across it unaware of Kitaj or his work would at once become engrossed in his rich and distinctive mental world, in which an exploration of twentieth-century history and culture is fused with powerful imagination. While one or two texts are tough going, others, especially the introduction and the essays by Janet Wolff, John Lynch, Simon Faulkner and Alan Woods, are difficult to put down.

Multiple readings of Kitaj's work are offered. As is only natural, some are mutually incompatible. There is no clear agreement on whether Kitaj is modernist or anti- or post-modernist, but the implied definitions of modernism vary. It is not always clear that Kitaj, when making his pictures, had in mind all that some writers imply he did, for example 'staging the forty-nine layers of meaning of the Talmud' (Deppner). It also seems unlikely that Kitaj sees the relationship between a painting and its related text as being as complex (or, still more, as fraught) as some writers find it to be. Most implicitly agree, however, that Kitaj 'seeks to preserve the capacity of art to coin images capable of taking on a social function through the collective memory'. They testify to his use of painting to address a wide range of disciplines, of subjects and of human experience, not least the oppressed and the previously marginalised or forgotten. They concur that in doing all this he opens new relationships and meanings.

A major point of reference for most of the essays is Kitaj's Tate retrospective of 1994, which travelled to Los Angeles and New York. The critical furore this notoriously provoked in England is analysed in Janet Wolff's fascinating essay. She points out the puzzling contrast between this outburst and the generally affirmative reception not only of the same exhibition in America but also of Kitaj's art both before and since 1994. She also records that a significant focus of the London controversy was Kitaj's own texts about many individual pictures, published in the catalogue and displayed beside the works. Yet as Wolff rightly observes, 'it seems very likely that something other than objections to textual references [alone] explains the extraordinary viciousness of the attacks'. She identifies this as 'the confluence of three separate, and normally unemphatic, English sentiments: a certain anti-literary prejudice in art criticism, a lingering anti-Americanism [although one critic was a fellow American], and a persistent (though by no means pervasive) anti-semitism'. She connects the last of these not to the fact of Kitaj's being Jewish or even to his concern with Jewish themes and experience, but rather to the fact that these themes had come to be so prominent in his art and, to make matters 'worse', were now emphasised by his accompanying texts. The crux, as she sees it, is that the English do not like ostentatious difference. She quotes Nina Darnton's depressing but convincing belief

that the English and American reviews 'reveal a culture clash between the reserved, self-deprecatory English and the open, Jewish-American sensibility'.

Wolff also points up, however, the contrast between the English critical hostility of 1994 and the affirmative interest in Kitaj's art of the English art world as a whole. This conspicuously includes curators and academics, but also (as one could observe of the many visitors to the 1994 Tate exhibition not deterred from coming by the critical barrage) the gallery-going public, for whom Kitaj's texts are a bonus. Thus the contrast is especially striking between the hostility of many critics then and the open-mindedness with which Kitaj's work is approached by almost all the present contributors.

A key factor here may be the uncategorisability of Kitaj's art. While several of these writers rightly identify this as a strength, it is a problem for some critics. And while each of Kitaj's pictures is powerful without any supporting information, many critics had difficulty with the relationship between a work of art and another entity (a text), which not only was itself a creative work but, together with the work it elucidated, produced (optionally) a still richer experience. Some English critics of 1994 also disliked the looser facture of the later works. This connected to a manner Kitaj had developed (as he continues to do), which he has called 'painting-drawing' and identifies as an important strand in earlier twentieth-century art. A natural response to 'ostentatious' features of Kitaj's art, whether in style, in content, in an insistent 'un-Englishness' or in the prominence accorded to writing, would be to regard them as enrichments of our culture. Wolff's essay, like the others in this book, helps us to see that in their resistance to Kitaj's art – however sincere – his London critics of 1994 impoverished it.

A central theme of *Critical Kitaj* is the status of Kitaj's commentaries on his pictures as 'privileged readings'. As the editors explain: 'What motivated us . . . was a desire to see Kitaj's work subject to a rigorous reading that went beyond . . . proclaimed artistic intention . . . Kitaj is motivated by a genuine desire to explain, to dispel the modernist myth of self-contained and self-present meaning. However . . . given the status of the artist as the privileged figure within the discourse of art . . . the consequence of this is an impression of a coherent and unified relationship between producer and cultural product that belies the actuality of the process. Not only may the public readings be contested but it is also the case, perhaps, that the private readings of the artist himself are actually self-contested . . . [But] one aspect . . . of such statements is the appearance of a fixing of meaning and a limiting of potential interpretation.' As they add, 'this is not something that can be, or should be avoided'.

John Lynch draws attention to the way in which Kitaj, over the years, sometimes not only augments the commentary he first published about a work but, in new commentaries, changes the emphasis of his original account. He observes that: 'it could be argued that the flip side of the liberal urge to

explain is an (author)itarian impulse to maintain control of what is fundamentally a public exchange. Kitaj positions himself as the cultural mediator in this process of negotiation that seems to extend beyond the boundaries of the canvas'.

Kitaj gives numerous indications that some of his commentaries are fictitious in whole or part, but even if the commentaries were to be taken entirely at face value (as, in the main, they are) it is obvious that, of their nature, they would be selective constructions. Moreover, it is natural, as time passes, for anyone to develop different perspectives on subjects that interest them. Thus it stands to reason that no commentary by Kitaj can constitute the whole truth about a work, that our reading of a work cannot be restricted to what the artist tells us about it and that additional interpretations of a work will proliferate, as they do in this book. But though Lynch quotes Barthes's statement that the 'birth of the reader must be at the expense of the death of the Author', special interest must surely attach to Kitaj's exceptionally vivid and suggestive writings on any of his own works, however long after its completion they appear.

Such texts do not diminish the often powerful ambiguity in most works by Kitaj, a quality much discussed in this book. There is general agreement that his pictures and commentaries prevent closure and refuse fixed meanings, but also that defiance of ultimate explanation is another strength of his art. For David Peters Corbett, the paintings are the site of a contest between Kitaj's wish to underpin them with the authority of words and his sense that words are inadequate to convey the vividness of what was experienced in history. Of Holocaust and exile he writes that 'unfinishedness is the necessary condition of any attempt to understand and organise this material', but that 'the resistance of . . . events . . . to comprehension through the word allows visuality in these works to strengthen its position as a medium of knowledge'.

Several essays establish, and in some cases propose, an even fuller intellectual and historical background to specific paintings than Kitaj or others have previously advanced. Notable among these is Simon Faulkner's account of the complex background to *Kennst du das Land?* (1962), both in the Spanish Civil War and in Kitaj's later contact with anarchist and Republican circles in Spain, as well as in then-recent and concurrent painting in both New York and London. He analyses Kitaj's associated use of the image of the anarchist leader Durruti, mortally wounded while defending Madrid in 1936, and the statement implicitly made by *Kennst du das Land?* both about Francoist suppression of the memory of 'a murdered utopian moment' in Spain and about the distinction between concepts of the 'ethical' in art that were current in 1962 and Kitaj's more historically engaged approach.

Though centred illuminatingly on the close relation of Kitaj's art to film, Alan Woods's essay is richly suggestive about many other influences on him, including the creative disorder of the milieu of the second-hand bookshop. Martin Roman Deppner

examines Kitaj's art in relation to the thinking of Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas and the *Renouveau Juif*. Referring in particular to Kitaj's *If not, not* (1975–76), he relates the influence on Kitaj of the poetry of Pound and Eliot to the rôle of connexion, memory and commentary in the use of the Talmud across the centuries, as well as to the application of permutation to the Cabbala to release the imaginative potential of images. Giles Peaker explores 'the allegorical in Kitaj's work as a means of operating both in and on history'.

Abounding in useful and sometimes otherwise elusive documentary references to material by and about Kitaj (not confined to printmaking), Pat Gilmour's essay examines the remarkable screenprints Kitaj made with Chris Prater from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, and Kitaj's later mixed feelings about them. Gilmour rightly notes these prints' range of reference and their visual and imaginative strength. She explores Kitaj's methods of working with Prater, often at long distance but nevertheless with close engagement and to highly personal effect.

At many points in this book, Kitaj's art is identified as 'liberal humanist'. A question raised frequently in the essays is the place (or, for some writers, the value) of art of this kind in the context of the ravages of totalitarianism and the rise of information technology and of a powerful international corporate culture. James Aulich discusses this in his interesting essay relating Kitaj's painting of 1975–85 to the work of the other leading artists of what has become known as the School of London. He concludes that: 'Kitaj, Bacon, Auerbach, Freud and Kossoff all reveal their insecurities in the face of a bankrupt tradition and unstable human relationships . . . [Kitaj's] art is a denial of the late modernist continuum Greenberg had proposed. It prefers, instead, to reconfigure fragments of the past and to save from the official narratives that which has been forgotten in a ritual of repetition which refuses consolation, and in so doing holds onto a hope for future happiness.'

The most emphatic questioning of what the editors describe as 'the liberal humanist discourse of high art' is the essay by Terry Atkinson, who sees Kitaj's art as merely recapitulatory of functions of representation established long ago. Kitaj, he writes, 'is an ancestor worshipper . . . Ancestor worship . . . maintains the high value of the tradition . . . Kitaj's practice presupposes a continuity, the continuity not least being painting. This is a presupposition made . . . throughout . . . the members of the so-called School of London. It is also . . . made throughout large sectors of the wider art milieu'. Atkinson goes on to state that 'Kitaj's painting is . . . allegedly driven by inner compulsion. He is the paradigmatic modernist painter, the painter producing out of his own studio . . . a symbolic space for sanctified ongoing inner/private cognitive transactions, allegedly profound and allegedly a self-confirming centre of truth'. He contrasts such practice, to its discredit, with that of Art & Language, undertaken by more than one person at a time and if possible in the con-

text of teaching.

While one questions Atkinson's reservation about the very practice of painting, it is extraordinary (though deliberate) that he should exemplify it by reference to work that offers the viewer such intense experience, at once of Kitaj's arresting marks and of the human and cultural subjects he brings freshly to life in each picture. For the many people (including the majority of this book's contributors) to whom the results are at once distinctive and nourishing, Kitaj's work directly refutes the idea that his practice is irrelevant today.

RICHARD MORPHET

**Signifying Art: Essays on Art After 1960.** By Marjorie Welsh. 321 pp. with 43 b. & w. ills. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999), £25. ISBN 0-300-07532-4.

Except for two pieces on Donald Judd, the chapters of this book originated in articles in art or academic magazines, or as catalogue texts. Three sections address, respectively, issues of the hand and 'touch'; the related questions of expressivity, expressionism and expression; and, as the last section is titled, 'Ideas of Order'. The tacit quotation here from Wallace Stevens betrays Welsh's literary perspective as a practising poet (whose selected verse has recently appeared). But her art writings are not of the free, poetical-associative kind. If anything she is fiercely rationalist. Yet one is aware of a creative writer's sensibility, not only in terms such as 'comeliness' used as an opposite to 'theory' (in describing Jasper Johns's avoidance of the latter); or 'doublet' (to describe Rauschenberg's conscious repetition of a spontaneous or random drip), but also in the way abstract argument is enjoyed for its own formal sake, almost for its sound, as well as for its illumination. At times there is a curious turn of phrase reminiscent of Adrian Stokes.

Welsh's concerns are broadly with the art that came after Abstract Expressionism, and with how artists reacted against, moved on from or adapted the New York School's emotive gestural abstraction. Johns, Rauschenberg and Twombly are naturally among her major protagonists (each featuring in several chapters in the book) all of whom complicate and reprocess the spontaneous mark in different ways. Guston's move from gestural abstraction to figuration is of course a central case for her too, as is Newman's philosophical proto-minimalism. The seemingly anti-organic and anti-expressive grids and fields of artists such as Judd and LeWitt are also accepted as paradigmatic; and there is a discussion of continuing figuration, in the form of a comparison between Alex Katz and Eric Fischl.

As much as a discussion of art, however, this book is involved with art criticism and includes examinations of the thought of mid-century figures such as Max Kozloff, Meyer Schapiro, Barbara Rose, Greenberg and Rosenberg (the latter two have chapters to themselves), and aestheticians such as

Dewey or Croce. There is engagement with more recent writers on Welsh's chosen artists – Rosalind Krauss, Lucy Lippard and many more – and due acknowledgement made of recent continental theory.

One thing that makes the book unusual is that the catchment of artists includes less mainstream figures such as Siah Armajani and Oyvind Fahlstrom, and currently mid-career figures such as James Hyde, Kes Zapkus, Tom Nozkowski, Nancy Haynes and Mary Kelly. Thus the book is finally more of a highly informed, thoroughly conceptualised and individually accented survey of post-War American art, rather than a cohesive thesis. This is in refreshing contrast to the myriad recent academic books driven by didactic preconception. If there is a superintending idea here, it is possibly, and paradoxically, that of 'indeterminacy' and the principle of 'the open work' that also overarches the existentialist late modernism of Abstract Expressionism and the relativist post-modernism both of minimalist art works (usually neither rationalist nor autonomous, as Welsh reveals) and of the more quirky post-formalist contemporaries she favours. Also refreshing is Welsh's instinctive restriction to painting and sculpture, albeit often at the boundaries of their definition. The effect is more cogent than many a study that dutifully pursues interdisciplinary.

MERLIN JAMES

## Publications received

*Charles Fairfax Murray. The Unknown Pre-Raphaelite.* By David B. Elliott. 266 pp. incl. 10 col. pls. + 2 b. & w. ills. (The Book Guild Ltd, Lewes, 2000), £25. ISBN 1-85776-510-9.

Charles Fairfax Murray was a protégé of Ruskin and became Burne-Jones's first studio assistant. He also worked for Morris and Rossetti and has been acclaimed (by A.C. Sewter) as 'the most brilliant stained-glass painter' in the service of Morris, Faulkner & Co. Yet despite the vast amount of publications in recent years devoted to this area of Victorian art, he has remained an understudied figure. David B. Elliott, the artist's grandson, has now provided a biography, making use of Murray's papers now widely scattered. Murray's substantial surviving correspondence illuminates his relations with the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite circle and his extensive work as a copyist of Italian paintings for Ruskin, the Guild of St George, and the Arundel Society. Elliott recognises that his subject's artistic talent was relatively modest, so much so that none of Murray's Giorgionesque imaginative paintings is here reproduced or analysed. But Elliott does claim that Murray's work influenced one of Siena's leading painters of the period, Ricciardo Meacci.

The core of Elliott's text concentrates on Murray's activity as an art agent and expert on Italian painting. As John Christian notes in a thoughtful introduction: 'Murray and Ricketts were virtually the last of the artist-connoisseurs.' As a *marchand amateur* he succeeded to the rôle filled in the previous generation by the minor painter William Blundell Spence. Murray acted as agent for men as different as Frederick Burton, Director of the National Gallery, Thomas Armstrong, Director of Art at the South Kensington Museum, Wilhelm von Bode and Friedrich Lippmann at the Berlin Gemäldegalerie and Kupferstichkabinett. Also recorded by Elliott are his dealings with American collectors and museum officials and his friendships with Robert Benson and George Salting. Agnew's were also considerably indebted to Murray's expertise. It would have been helpful if an appendix listing the present

whereabouts, where known, of the paintings mentioned in his correspondence had been provided. Murray's meeting in 1875 with Cavalcaselle was crucial and the Italian became his model as a connoisseur. Elliott recounts Murray's critical attitude to Ruskin's views on attribution, and his distrust of the methods of Morelli and of those he saw as his followers, J.P. Richter and Berenson. He prided himself that his close study of drawings and his concern with quality gave him the edge over his competitors as experts. Too little is said here of Murray's dealing in old-master drawings. Was his sale of 1,400 drawings to Pierpont Morgan his only significant venture in dealing in this field?

Murray's interests spread far beyond Italian art as is revealed by the donations he made from his own collection to Trinity Hall, Trinity College, and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and to the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Manuscripts, incunabula, autographs and British portraits were central to his gifts, but among the fine seventeenth-century paintings that he owned were works by Sébastien Bourdon and the Neapolitan Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds. It was due to Fairfax Murray and his friend, the solicitor, J.R. Holiday, that Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is so richly endowed with drawings by Burne-Jones, Rossetti and their Pre-Raphaelite friends.

MARTIN HOPKINSON

*The Modern Scot. Modernism and Nationalism in Scottish Art 1928–1955.* By Tom Normand. 195 pp. incl. 63 b. & w. ills. (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000), £49.95. ISBN 0-754-0100-5.

William McCance's *From another window in Thrums*, a painting of 1928 with a title that alludes critically to J.M. Barrie's classic late-Victorian novel *Kailyard*, provides the starting point for this analysis of the relations between progressive Scottish art, literature and politics. Normand shows how McCance's art, while formally indebted to Wyndham Lewis, relates to the vernacular writings of Hugh MacDiarmid, the leader of the 'Scottish Renaissance Movement'. The poet saw the artist as a potential adherent for his modernist nationalist programme. Normand establishes for the first time the significance of the St Andrews-based American James Huntington Whyte as founder and editor of the literary journal *The Modern Scot* and as a promoter of Scottish artists, through both his publications and his art gallery. Normand associates William Johnstone with his fellow Borderers, MacDiarmid and the composer Francis George Scott, in their project to raise the standard of the arts in Scotland. Johnstone saw the carvings of the Picts and Celts as earlier *exempla* of the symbolism and surrealism that inform his abstractions. J.D. Fergusson's paintings and sculpture are placed in the context of Celtic nationalism and Normand notes the dominance of symbolic Celtic subjects within the New Scottish Group, in which Fergusson was the driving force. The importance of the writings of John Tonge, George Bain and the publishing activity of William MacLellan are also highlighted in this ground-breaking study.

MARTIN HOPKINSON

*Cubism.* By Neil Cox. 448 pp. incl. 200 col. pls. + 50 b. & w. ills. (Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 2000), £14.95/\$24.95. ISBN 0-7148-4010-6.

This comprehensive survey is a judicious and accessible account of Cubism and the remarkable imaginative possibilities contained within it. One of Phaidon's *Art & Ideas* series, the book is aimed at a general readership. The colour reproductions are numerous and of a high quality, the archival photographs well chosen, and the layout attractive. The structure is broadly chronological and the focus is primarily on painting and sculpture, but the text also encompasses architecture and design, film and photography, and touches on poetry and music. There is a place too for the nicely-conceived excursion, such as the chapter entitled 'Buffalo Bill Meets Wilbur Wright', which examines the self-sufficient dialogue and game-playing of Picasso and Braque, through a discussion of their own pho-