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***The Art of Haiti* by Eleanor Ingalls Christensen (review)**

Constance E. Wagar

Leonardo

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Books 165 Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan, Hobbs tells in great detail that it is a bustling 'focal point' for shoppers, diners, strollers, businessmen, pickpockets, prostitutes and tourists. Another example might, to politically-sophisticated students, be regarded humorously, were it not for the serious heavy-handedness with which it is treated. In the chapter entitled 'The Hero', Hobbs compares movie actor John Wayne to King Arthur, Theseus and &us! *The Art of Haiti*. Eleanor Ingalls Christensen. A. S. Barnes, Cranbury, N.J., Thomas Yoseloff, London, 1975. 126 pp., illus. \$15.00, f6.00. Reviewed by Constance E. Wagar* I knew nothing of the art of Haiti until I opened this book. Then, what a fascinating panorama was spread before me! The book opens with a brief review of Haiti's history, its geographical features and their bearing on its art. Of the early stages, Christensen says: 'All in all, this period of violent contrasts in the history of Haiti-ranging from the horrors of the slave traffic and these people's degrading and killing servitude, to the development of the world's richest colony-was not to produce any artist of significance or enduring memory' (p. 29). So, perhaps it is not so surprising to find in the 20th century an instance of a sudden and prolific interest in art. The author pays high tribute to De Witt Peters, an artist who arrived from the U.S.A. in 1943 to teach English at the

Government Lycke. He soon became the moving spirit behind a growing consciousness of the importance of aesthetic expression. His chief contribution was the establishment of the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince in 1944. Three pages of the book are devoted to a chronology of the Centre (Appendix A). The annotations give evidence of careful research, but since they are all from secondary sources, one wonders how long Christensen stayed in Haiti (mention is made of a 'visit' in 1969) and whether she made direct contact with any of the artists. Appendix B contains brief biographies of more than 100 artists of the 20th century; three are sculptors and the remainder are predominantly primitive painters. This is followed by a useful bibliography and an index. The most delightful feature of the book is the collection of 36 illustrations in colour and 38 in black and white. But why were not the works of these Haitian artists dated, to permit one to trace their historical background? I recommend this book to those who have a special interest in the art history of the Third World.

After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters 1870-1900. Revised edition. Alfred Frankenstein. Univ. California Press, Berkeley, 1975. 200 pp., illus. \$21.00. Reviewed by Howard S. Meinhart** This is a welcome reprinting of the revised second edition (1969) of a classic work on William Michael Harnett (1848-1892) and late 19th-century trompe-l'oeil still-life painting in the U.S.A. Its title is well chosen - not only was Harnett's most famous painting so named, but in his book Frankenstein presents the well-organized and illustrated running account and results of his own lengthy and most interesting detective work in developing a clear picture of the artist's life and compiling an oeuvre catalog (154 works recovered by 1969). It was not easy. Following the Harnett revival of the mid-1930's, more than 100 works attributed to him were known by 1947. Wide stylistic and qualitative differences among them raised numerous questions whose answers Frankenstein decided to seek out. In doing so he discovered that many so-called Harnetts were, in fact, paintings by John Frederick Pet0 and a number of lesser artists, bearing forged Harnett signatures. As the author puts it: '... a piece of research that started out with a critical biography of Harnett as its only objective had to raise its sights to include the whole of American still life from 1870 to 1900.' This enormous task, by no means yet completed, had turned up by 1969 some 44 still-life

*Naparima Girls' High School, San Fernando, Trinidad, West Indies. **Dept of Fine Arts, College of Arts and Science, University of Rochester, River Campus Station, Rochester, NY 14627, U.S.A.

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Galkria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan, Hobbs tells in great detail that it is a beautiful "total print" for shoppers, diners, scrollers, businessmen, pot smokers, prostitutes and tourists. Another example might be politically-motivated cartoons, he suggested humorously, were it not for the serious heavy-handsomeness with which it is treated. In the chapter entitled "The Hero", Hobbs compares movie actor John Wayne in King Arthur, Theseus and Zeus!

The Art of Haiti. Eltona Ingalls Christensen. A. S. Barnes, Cambridge, N.J., Thomas Yacovelli, London, 1975. 126 pp., illus. \$15.00; £6.00. Reviewed by **Constance E. Wagner***

I knew nothing of the art of Haiti until I opened this book. Then, what a fascinating panorama was spread before me! The book opens with a brief review of Haiti's history, its geographical features and their bearing on its art. Of the early stages, Christensen says: "All in all, this period of violent contrasts in the history of Haiti—ranging from the horrors of the slave traffic and these people's degrading and killing servitude, to the development of the world's richest colony—was not to produce any artist of significance or enduring maturity" (p. 29). So, perhaps it is not so surprising to find in the 20th century an instance of a *rudon* and people's interest in art.

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I recommend this book to those who have a special interest in the art history of the Third World.

After the Haiti: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters 1870-1900. Revised edition. Alfred Frankenstein. Univ. California Press, Berkeley, 1975. 280 pp., illus. £21.00. Reviewed by **Harold S. Stewart****

This is a welcome reprinting of the revised second edition (1969) of a classic work on William Michael Harnett (1849-1900) and his 19th-century *trompe l'oeil* still-life painting in the U.S.A. Its title is well chosen—not only was Harnett's most famous painting so named, but in his book Frankenstein presents the well-organized and illustrated running account and results of his own lengthy and most interesting detective work in developing a clear picture of the artist's life and compiling an *oeuvre* of 619 (158 works recovered by 1969). It was not easy. Following the Harnett revival of the mid-1930's, more than 100 works attributed to him were known by 1947. Wide stylistic and qualitative differences among them raised numerous questions whose answers Frankenstein decided to seek out. In doing so he discovered that many so-called Harnetts were, in fact, paintings by John Frederick Peto and a number of lesser artists, bearing forged Harnett signatures. As the author puts it: "... a piece of research that started not with a critical biography of Harnett as its only objective had to raise its sights to include the waste of American still life from 1870 to 1900." This enormous task, by no means yet completed, had turned up by 1969 some 44 still-life

painters, most of whom were either followers of, or influenced by, Harnett. From this number, Frankenstein singles out Peto and John Haberle as major figures. Six other painters are included in what he calls the "second circle" and are dealt with quite extensively. Thirty-six more comprise the "third circle", of which 17 receive detailed treatment and 19, at the time of writing, were known only by signatures on one or two paintings.

The first chapter describes the problem of isolating Harnett's work from that of his followers, most importantly Peto's, and its solution. There come excellent separate chapters on Harnett, Peto, Haberle, the second circle and the third circle. This follows a critical catalog of Harnett's work, including a listing of forgeries and misattributed pictures.

This book is also a pleasure to read. Frankenstein is an art historian and one of broad background, much sound common sense and humor; his style is informal, apparently easygoing, yet little of pertinence escapes his attention. He presents an excellent and informative discussion of *trompe l'oeil* and adequate consideration of European influences as well as the forerunners in the U.S.A., such as the Peas. The influence of photography is not neglected, nor is the possible relationship of American *trompe l'oeil* and its revival with 20th-century art movements, including Pop.

This is a fundamental work of key importance for 19th-century painting in the U.S.A.

Art Chronicles 1954-1966. Frank O'Hara. Braziller, New York, 1975. 165 pp., illus. Paper. \$7.95. Reviewed by **James W. Davis†**

Written between 1954-66, most of the essays in this book are critical evaluations or observations by O'Hara on a number of prominent artists of the period, particularly those associated with what some consider to be the first indigenous painting style in the U.S.A., Abstract Expressionism, including the painters Pollock, Motherwell, Guano and Kline and the sculptors David Smith, Spivey and Nakian. Further essays include an interview with Larry Rivers; a panel discussion with Jan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning, Mike Goldberg and Norman Buhac; a collaborative essay done with Kline; an article tracing the development of a single work by Giorgio Casallon (reminiscent of similar documentations of various artists' working processes appearing in *Art Now* in the 1950's) and a somewhat humorous reaction to the (then new) Guggenheim Museum in New York City in the context of the Abstract Expressionists and Imagists Show of 1962.

No clear indication is provided in the book regarding who selected the essays and the order in which they appear. Like many critical anthologies, there is little logic in the book's arrangement and it is doubtful that the various writings were selected from the best by O'Hara, especially those published in it. The manuscripts may have been chosen on the basis of the fame of the artist discussed rather than the quality of the particular essay.

O'Hara wrote most of these studies in a quasi stream-of-consciousness style, but the results lack the spontaneous insight as well as the insight that such an approach provides in the hands of a writer who is able to combine effectively words and evocations of both the mind and spirit, as with Breton. O'Hara was a poet before all else, in spite of his other vocations as a curator and critic and the explicit demands imposed by the function of criticism seem to have eclipsed his abilities as a writer. The most easily-written and clearly most revealing "essay" in the book is the small introductory poem called "Why I Am Not a Painter".

Taken as a whole, the writings are gross but evasive, employing verbiage drawn from the leading exponents of expressionist criticism of the time (Rosenberg and Hux) but lacking the power to possess one's imagination in a direct relationship with the nature of the art works under discussion.

O'Hara was very familiar with the artists and their works. His personal acquaintanceship with the leading practitioners in the art of his day is well-known. This alone makes the book a valuable supplement to other documents of the period. Yet, familiarity alone does not guarantee clarity when conveying one's impressions concerning art, nor does it necessarily generate sufficient insight to transcend mere description.

1216 N. Newmil. Macomb, IL 61455, U.S.A.

*Naparima Girls' High School, San Fernando, Trinidad, West Indies.

**Dept of Fine Arts, College of Arts and Science, University of Rochester, River Campus Station, Rochester, NY 14627, U.S.A.



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