

Contemporary Collectibles: New books - from Elizabeth I to the Oscars

by Linda_Rosenkrantz

It's time to clear the bookshelf of a new crop of books about collectibles.

"80 Years Of The Oscar: The Official History Of The Academy Awards" by Robert Osborne (Abbeville Press, \$75). Long before he was the informed, affable and almost omnipresent host of "Turner Classic Movies," Robert Osborne was the official historian of the Academy Awards, and his cumulative research is now presented in a lavish volume chockfull of movie stills, posters, and documentary photos, as well as inside info and full of listings of nominees and winners. Beginning with the year of the ceremony's inception in 1927, Osborne chronicles the dinner at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel (complete with menu) and then moves year by year through 2007 – just missing the current ceremony. There's also a section of interesting facts and trivia, e.g. The most nominated losers? Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton.

"The Man With Kaleidoscope Eyes: The Art of Alan Aldridge" (Harry N. Abrams, \$35). If you're looking for a hit of psychedelic nostalgia this is the book for you. British designer Alan Aldridge is responsible for a lot of the eye-popping imagery associated with Beatles-period London and beyond. In a 40-year career, Aldridge has designed album covers for everyone from the Rolling Stones to Pink Floyd and Elton John, designed iconic books like "The Beatles Illustrated Lyrics," and done the poster for Warhol's "Chelsea Girls." This dazzlingly illustrated autobiography charts his extraordinary life and career, populated by such notables as Salvador Dali, Steve McQueen, and Prime Minister Harold Wilson, involved in anecdotes as colorful as the artwork. The only possible verdict: It's a trip.

"Miniature Rooms: The Thorne Rooms at the Art Institute of Chicago," by Fannia Weingartner et al (The Art Institute of Chicago, Yale University Press \$45). There is something irresistible about miniatures. In childhood, boys have their model train sets and girls have their dollhouses, but their fascination doesn't end with the onset of adulthood, perhaps because they let us escape to a more innocent, self-contained place. Among the most memorable of these miniature worlds consists of the 68 model interiors that constitute The Thorne Rooms at The Art Institute of Chicago, representing spaces ranging from an Elizabethan English Great Hall to a California hallway on the eve of World War II. They were created by Chicago socialite Mrs. James Ward Thorne (1882-1966), a self-trained and meticulous craftsman with a remarkable eye and sure sense of style. All the rooms are handsomely reproduced in this book, giving a sense of the incredible detail that went into these tiny scale models. Everything – whether a Persian carpet, a Biedermier cabinet, or a Cubist painting – is both appropriate and faithfully reproduced. A must for lovers of the liliputian.

"English Embroidery From the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580-1700: 'Twixt Art And Nature" by Andrew Morrall and Melinda Watt (Yale University Press, \$65). The Met has a splendid collection of early English embroidery from the late Tudor and Stuart eras, and this deluxe catalogue for an exhibition of its holdings provides an in-depth look at this intricate decorative art, with scholarly (and heavily footnoted), illuminating essays by six experts in the area. Seen in the context of their reflection of royal and feminist history, they examine such subjects as embroidered Biblical narratives, the depiction of nature and of royal subjects (such as an incredible portrait probably of Queen Elizabeth I, composed of satin worked with silk and metal threads, seed pearls, spangles, and glass beads-the earliest known English portrait executed in embroidery), interior furnishings – carpets, cushion covers and framed mirrors – and accessories of dress,

including elaborately embroidered nightcaps, jackets, gloves and purses . Of particular interest to collectors are a chapter on the history of collecting English domestic embroidery and a useful illustrated glossary of the main types of stitches employed.

Linda Rosenkrantz has edited Auction magazine and authored 18 books, including "Cool Names for Babies" and "The Baby Name Bible". She cannot answer letters personally.
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