

Contemporary Collectibles: New books - Cats to couture

by Linda_Rosenkrantz

Some recent books of particular interest:

"The Cat in Art" by Stefano Zuffi (Abrams, \$35). From the title, you might expect this to be some kitschy kitten book. Au contraire. It's a charming but substantive treatment of the subject, ranging from ancient Egyptian bronzes to a Tom Wesselman pop painting, and Francis Bacon, David Hockney and Lucian Freud portraits.

Arranged in roughly chronological order, it contains chapters on Antiquity-Egyptian goddesses to the mosaics of Pompeii; the Middle Ages-medieval illuminated manuscripts and French tapestries; the Renaissance-paintings by Van Eyck and Bosch, and exquisite sketches by Da Vinci; the Baroque - a period in which almost every great master, including Rubens, Rembrandt, and Velasquez, seemed to insert a feline into his work; and on through the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Impressionism and the modern period.

With its excellent reproductions and informed text, this is a book sure to make any cultured cat lover purr.

Lowy - "The Secret Lives Of Frames: One Hundred Years Of Art And Artistry" by Deborah Davis (Filipacchi Publishing, \$50). These days, beautiful old frames are attracting as much collector interest as the images contained within them.

This book celebrates a century of fine frame making and restoring by the Julius Lowy Frame & Restoring Co., started in New York in 1907, whose clients have included such distinguished institutions as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art (where they reframed, for example, Cezanne's "The Bather") and the National Gallery. This elegant, beautifully illustrated volume focuses on 100 stellar examples that have passed through the firm's doors, ranging from 15th and 16th century Italian Renaissance frames to 20th century American examples. Also given are illustrated explications of the techniques of carving and gilding, conservation and restoration, plus tips on inspecting and selecting frames.

"Patron Saints: A Feast Of Holy Cards" by Barbara Calamari and Sandra DiPasqua (Abrams, \$24.95). The holy card depicting saints has been an enduring element of the Catholic Church, a talisman carried for protection, presented at such ritual events as communions, confirmations and funerals as well as collected and traded.

In their follow-up to their similarly formatted "Holy Cards," the authors offer a wealth of information on a procession of saints, some immediately recognizable, some lesser known, divided into such categories as Saints of Health (including Agatha - breast disorders), Saints of Nations (Gertrude the Great, patron of the

West Indies), Saints of Nature (e.g. Martin de Porres, mouse infestation) and Saints of Occupations (Christina the Astonishing, patron saint of psychiatrists). The book is also noteworthy for its eye-catching graphics.

"Costume Jewelry For Haute Couture" by Florence Muller and Patrick Segal (Vendome, \$75). Dating back to the Coco Chanel 1920s, there has been a tradition of exceptional costume jewelry being created to accessorize and enhance specific pieces of haute couture fashion.

This copiously illustrated book, to be published in September, treats the subject with appropriate style and attention to detail, introducing the craftsmen behind the often overstated necklaces, bracelets and brooches adorning the couture designs of Chanel (a great promoter of costume jewelry), Dior, Balenciaga, Schiaparelli, Saint Laurent, Lacroix, and Valentino-artisans such as Xavier Loubens, Roger Scemama, Robert Goosens and many others - as seen in showrooms and the pages of Vogue.

Another book of interest to vintage clothing collectors and other fashionistas is the monumental "Poiret" by Harold Koda, Andrew Bolton and Nancy J. Troy (Yale University Press, \$65).

Ostensibly the catalogue for the recent show at the Metropolitan Museum, but in fact a lasting tribute to Paul Poiret, a towering figure at the beginning of the 20th century and a liberator of the female figure from the constricting corset, was a master of draping, and also formed the template for the modern haute couture business. The book, from its stunning golden cover and end papers onwards, will be indispensable to anyone interested in the field.

Linda Rosenkrantz has edited Auction magazine and authored 15 books, including "The Baby Name Bible" (St. Martin's Press; www.babynamebible.com). She cannot answer letters personally.

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