

BOOK REVIEW & MEDIA RECEIVED

International Pop

Edited by Darsie Alexander and Bartholomew Ryan

Walker Art Center, 2015

368 pp./\$85.00 (hb)



Visitors to the Walker Art Center's *International Pop* exhibition¹ will recognize that it is a massive display designed to transform perceptions about Pop art. Downplayed are familiar Andy Warhol soup cans and Roy Lichtenstein comic strips, in favor of global art works ranging from the political to the critical. Covering Pop's emergence in the 1950s through the early 1970s, it is a huge show, requiring time and energy to

consume. The Walker's director, Olga Viso, writes in her introduction to the exhibition catalog that "Pop was not a movement, not a style, but an ethos, one that permeated the consciousness of artists worldwide during a time of unprecedented social and cultural change" (6). Taking her words to heart, curators Darsie Alexander and Bartholomew Ryan have accomplished the Herculean task of demonstrating the broad range of Pop's influence, and this weighty and attractive catalog is a worthy companion to an ambitious exhibition.

The catalog offers a wealth of information centering on the global research done by Alexander and Ryan. Their own introduction to the reader expresses both excitement and exasperation at working on a subject so large and rather indefinable. They write, "We suggest that *Pop* is either the best wrong term for the work in this show or that the whole thing needs to be rethought, revalued, and re-energized—precisely the enterprise with which we are engaged" (8). As both the exhibition and catalog show, they have gathered work that the casual viewer might not consider or understand as Pop—work that is reactionary and complicated, rather than blatantly consumer driven as some of our most well-known Pop pieces tend to be. The catalog supports this unexpected inclusion by being a textbook of sorts, offering the reader a visual chronology gathered by Godfre Leung, assistant professor of art history at St. Cloud State University. Archived snapshots, captions, quotes, and entries that highlight important events chronicle and chart the intersection of political, cultural, and economic shifts during an era of radical change from 1945 to 1973.

To understand Pop as a global phenomenon and the ways in which different cultural regions used the tenets of Pop as expressive means, one must consider the role of politics in its dissemination. Consider that the United States government "helped engineer the international success of their domestic Pop artists in acts of Cold War cultural one-upmanship" (11), as Leung states. The reaction of artists overseas, feeling the effects of US political maneuvers, wealth, and excess, was often to make work that

was critical of US policies and culture. Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino reflected that, upon coming to the US to escape the repressive conditions in her own country, "I felt very uncomfortable. It was like living on crumbs from the rich man's table, in a country that was supporting the dictatorships in our continent" (63). Printed on brown paper to simulate newsprint, the sixty-four-page chronology is particularly useful in helping the viewer to understand the curators' broad selection of artworks and the complexity of the global impact of Pop.

In her introduction to the critical essays, Alexander describes Pop art as "transient, transferrable from one location to another, and accessible to a new class of viewers" (78). Dominated by an investigation into media and new ways of communicating, Pop was created for the masses and used mass culture as source material. Alexander uses the essay to explain the expansive approach that she and Ryan, along with their contributors, have taken to the subject:

Creating this exhibition required a methodology that took into account U.S. art of the period, honoring the Cold War dynamics in which American popular culture was the cultural export/import model while also exploring the myriad positions and vectors of influence that struggled for their own integrity and identity as they contended with U.S. economic might and the artistic practices it underwrote (79).

The history of Pop is inevitably intertwined with a propagandistic struggle for hearts and minds, one that continues to play out today through the ever-increasing sophistication of image dissemination. The catalog essays bring perspectives from Argentina, Great Britain, Brazil, Hungary, Italy, and Japan—adding valuable international voices to expand upon our understanding of Pop and why it looked and felt so different abroad.

Many catalogs choose a glossy finish for plates of art works. *International Pop* presents the images on matte pages,

Page spread from *International Pop* with (left) *Fashion Fiction I: Vogue USA, Feb. 1, 1968* (1968) by Eduardo Costa; (right) *Billiken* (1968) by Jorge de la Vega



respecting the palette and surface of much of the work, and continuing the media-derived trope of the design. Artist information and description is given with each image, yet without the three-letter country designation that is used in other parts of the catalog. This would have been welcome information for the reader to continue the cross-cultural connections that the visual chronicle and essays expose—a small detail that does not diminish the elegant and stylish design by Andrea Hyde. The catalog provides a luxury viewing experience of artwork that was specifically about breaking boundaries and exploring new visual techniques.

The *International Pop* exhibition and catalog, as indicated by the curators, cannot be definitive statements on the global phenomenon that was Pop art. They do, however, accomplish the goal of offering new, challenging, and in-depth observations on

the genre from a range of voices brought together in one place. The exhibition offers greatly broadened perspectives on what Pop art is, how it came to be, and why it has been so influential. For anyone who has the opportunity to see the exhibition, the catalog will enrich the viewing experience. It can, however, also stand on its own as an original and substantive resource for individuals particularly interested in the time period it investigates or in understanding the foundations of art practice in today's globalized world.

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NOTE 1. The exhibition *International Pop* was on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, April 11–August 29, 2015, and will be on view at the Dallas Museum of Art, October 11, 2015–January 17, 2016, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, February 18–May 15, 2016.

BOOKS

The Ancients and the Postmoderns: On the Historicity of Forms, by Fredric Jameson. Verso Books/306 pp./\$34.95 (hb).

Biko's Ghost: The Iconography of Black Consciousness, by Shannen L. Hill. University of Minnesota Press/366 pp./\$29.95 (sb).

Cinema and the Audiovisual Imagination: Music, Image, Sound, by Robert Robertson. I.B. Tauris/256 pp./\$90.00 (hb).

The Culture of Photography in Public Space, edited by Anne Marsh, Melissa Miles, and Daniel Palmer. Intellect/191 pp./\$50.00 (sb).

Deep Mapping the Media City, by Shannon Mattern. University of Minnesota Press/51 pp./\$7.95 (sb).

Devices of Curiosity: Early Cinema and Popular Science, by Oliver Gaycken. Oxford University Press/254 pp./\$29.95 (sb).

Digital Shift: The Cultural Logic of Punctuation, by Jeff Scheible. University of Minnesota Press/160 pp./\$20.00 (sb).

An Era Without Memories: Chinese Contemporary Photography on Urban

Transformation, by Jiang Jiehong. Thames & Hudson/191 pp./\$45.00 (hb).

Feminist Surveillance Studies, edited by Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet. Duke University Press/282 pp./\$25.95 (sb).

Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945, by Weihong Bao. University of Minnesota Press/479 pp./\$30.00 (sb).

A Geology of Media, by Jussi Parikka. University of Minnesota Press/206 pp./\$24.95 (sb). [See review in this issue of *Afterimage*.]

Imaginary Apparatus: New York City and Its Mediated Representation, by McLain Clutter. Park Books/200 pp./\$45.00 (hb).

InDEBTed to Intervene: Critical Lessons in Debt, Communication, Art, and Theoretical Practice, edited by Oliver Vodeb and Nikola Janović Kolenc. Intellect/223 pp./\$23.00 (sb).

Jim Jarmusch: Music, Words and Noise, by Sara Piazza. Reaktion Books/416 pp./\$27.00 (sb).

The Magic World of Orson Welles, Centennial Anniversary edition, by James

Naremore. University of Illinois Press/340 pp./\$20.00 (sb). [See review in a forthcoming issue of *Afterimage*.]

Of Walking in Ice: Munich–Paris, 23 November–14 December 1974, by Werner Herzog. University of Minnesota Press/125 pp./\$19.95 (sb).

Photography and the Art of Chance, by Robin Kelsey. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press/398 pp./\$32.95 (hb).

Photography for Everyone: The Cultural Lives of Cameras and Consumers in Early Twentieth-Century Japan, by Kerry Ross. Stanford University Press/234 pp./\$24.95 (sb).

Re-Collecting Black Hawk: Landscape, Memory, and Power in the American Midwest, by Nicholas A. Brown and Sarah E. Kanouse. University of Pittsburgh Press/279 pp./\$39.95 (hb).

Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde, by John Roberts. Verso Books/322 pp./\$29.95 (sb).

Ruins and Fragments: Tales of Loss and Rediscovery, by Robert Harbison. Reaktion Books/272 pp./\$35.00 (hb).

Shooting Women: Behind the Camera, Around the World, by Harriet Margolis,

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