

Newsday.com

'On Reading' leads a stockingful of gift books

BY PETER TERZIAN

Special to Newsday

December 7, 2008

There's no better gift for a book lover than a book. But for a certain kind of book lover, there's no better gift than a book celebrating the love of books. "On Reading" is a collection of photographs of readers around the world, taken over the course of six decades by the late Hungarian photojournalist André Kertész. Some of Kertész's readers find companionship through shared engagement: In one photo, three ragged children pore over a single volume on the curb of a dirty Paris street. Most, however, read alone, in deep communion with the words in front of them. A woman sits upright on the leaf-covered ground of the Luxembourg Gardens, intently reading the newspaper. In the chaos of a Manila marketplace, a young girl hovers over a piece of paper she has picked out of a pile of printed scraps. New

Yorkers retreat to the quiet of their rooftops to steal a few moments of light and literature.



Kertész's charming book is a tribute to a print culture that's sadly on life support. As we catapult into the Age of the Kindle, it's heartening to know that there are still publishers willing to embrace the grand bookmaking projects of an earlier age. In 1937, Nonesuch Press published a limited-edition set of the complete works of Charles Dickens, using the rare woodblock and steel plates fashioned by Dickens' original printers. Only 877 copies were made - you can score a set on AbeBooks.com for \$12,500 and up. Overlook Press is launching a series of facsimile editions of "The Nonesuch Dickens," beginning this fall with nine novels, including "David Copperfield," "Bleak House" and "A Tale of Two Cities." The books are handsomely made, with sewn bindings and leather spines, but they're worth the price if only for the crisply reprinted illustrations - of such legendary characters as Miss Havisham, Mr. Pecksniff and Wilkins Micawber - by Dickens' collaborators Phiz, George Cruikshank and others.

Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is one of the few great novels that makes you want to leave your house and rush out to a museum. Proust, who was passionate about art, frequently described his scenes and characters in relation to western masterpieces: the courtesan Odette, for example, is compared to a figure in a Botticelli fresco; the cloudscape out of the narrator's hotel window at a seaside resort reminds him of Whistler. For "Paintings in Proust," Eric Karpeles, himself a painter, has identified and tracked down every work of art mentioned in Proust's seven-volume novel; each reference is paired with a reproduction of the work described. This is the companion to the great French writer that you didn't know that you needed.

If the genially snobby Proust lived today, he would most likely be a regular at the Waverly Inn, the exclusive, celebrity-packed Greenwich Village restaurant opened in 2006 by Vanity Fair editor Graydon Carter. "The Mural at the Waverly Inn" is a guidebook to cartoonist Edward Sorel's whimsical panorama of 20th century Village Bohemians, which decorates the restaurant walls. Forty-two of the neighborhood's legendary artists, writers and attention-getters do what they do best: Edna St. Vincent Millay and her lover Edmund Wilson cavort in the nude, Norman Mailer gazes lovingly at his reflection in a pool of water, Truman Capote floats through the scene on butterfly wings.

Naturally, many of the same personalities on the Waverly walls appear in "Vanity Fair: The Portraits," one of a troika of new books that showcases celebrity photography at its best. Because of the magazine's interrupted history - one incarnation ran from 1914 to 1936; the next from 1983 to the present - the book mixes up luminous black-and-white photographs from the Jazz Age with splashier shots of contemporary celebrities. The juxtapositions can be a little jarring - pure-as-snow silent film stars Lillian and Dorothy Gish, for instance, opposite Jackie and Joan Collins in high-'80s gaudiness. But the early portraits, from the careworn face of Thomas Hardy to a fiery-eyed Paul Robeson, are a revelation; the magazine employed such legendary camera artists as Edward Steichen, Edward Weston and Man Ray.

In "Seen Behind the Scene," Vanity Fair photographer Mary Ellen Mark gathers her documentary work from the sets of famous (and not-so-famous) movies: Dustin Hoffman getting made up with a prosthetic derriere for "Tootsie," or the glowering Marlon Brando posing with a cockroach on his bald head during the filming of "Apocalypse Now." On the first page of "Richard Avedon: Performance," a collection of portraits of the leading lights of theater, film, music and dance, the photographer's muse, Audrey Hepburn, cheerfully does a staggering high kick. (Avedon was the inspiration for Dick Avery, the Fred Astaire character in the 1957 Hepburn vehicle "Funny Face.") Elsewhere in this dazzling collection, a suave street performer entertains a crowd in the Sicilian city of Palermo, Simone Signoret leans on the shoulder of husband Yves Montand and the members of Monty Python mug in the altogether.

The performing musicians who sprouted up in the British rock scene of the 1970s embraced heavy, trippy sounds. The design team Hipgnosis, led by Aubrey Powell and Strom Thorgerson, made record album sleeves to match the wildness of the music: psychedelic colors, UFOs, dissolving faces and lots of nudity. Flipping through "For the Love of Vinyl" is like walking into a groovy record shop of 30 years ago. All the iconic covers of the rock era are here, including Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon," T. Rex's "Electric Warrior" and Genesis' "The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway." The wittily narrated back stories are as entertaining as the covers themselves. (The army of pink children climbing up the orange mountain on Led Zeppelin's "Houses of the Holy," for example, was a collage of a brother and sister scampering around a rock formation on the Irish coast, wearing automotive spray paint.)

Chances are that if you were a prog-rock-loving child in the '70s, you also remember pasting Wacky Package stickers of Blunder Bread, Cover Ghoul makeup and Cap'n Crud cereal on your school notebook (or worse, on your bedroom walls). Jacketed in mnemonic wax paper, "Wacky Packages" is a catalog of the gross-out parody stickers - beloved by children, reviled by parents - that were illustrated by such pre-fame comic artists as Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith. Stick of gum not included.

Matteo Pericoli's "World Unfurled" manages to pack the entire globe into a 10-foot-long foldout panorama, a replica of the hand-drawn mural that the artist created for the American Airlines terminal at JFK. In Pericoli's world, architectural marvels rub shoulders: the painted ladies of San Francisco find themselves neighbors to Edinburgh Castle, and Tokyo City Hall towers over Cairo's Alabaster Mosque. Pericoli, a Milan native, shares a gentle wit and love of place with his fellow countryman, the late photographer Luigi Ghirri. "It's Beautiful Here, Isn't It ... " (note the undercurrent of doubt) is a selection of Ghirri's photographs, which capture strange mashups of everyday things: In one photo, a square in Parma, seen through the window of a haberdashery, looks as though it were being rained on by hats; in another, a cigarette butt has been stubbed out in a souvenir ashtray bearing a picture of Michelangelo's "David."

It's a good bet that no city in the world has been photographed as often as New York, and no one photographed it as thoroughly as Berenice Abbott. Originally issued in 1939, her classic "Changing New York" has just been reissued after years out of print. Abbott photographed the city for a WPA project throughout the 1930s, a time when steel-and-girder modernity was dwarfing 19th century elegance. Abbott trained her lens on the grand (skyscrapers, bridges) and the intimate (a Bleeker Street barber shop window). Her New York photographs appear again in "Berenice Abbott," a massive two-volume boxed set that draws from all aspects of her work, including portraits of Jean Cocteau, James Joyce and her mentor, Eugène Atget, taken during her early years in Paris.

The men who designed the skyscrapers that Abbott photographed could never have envisioned the creations to be found in "The Phaidon Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture": the enormous Kingdom Centre Building that rises above Riyadh (and looks like a futuristic bead purse), the "bird's nest" of steel strands that makes up Herzog and de Meuron's National Stadium of Beijing or the complex web of triangles that makes up New York's Hearst Tower. This

comprehensive book comes housed in its own futuristic structure, a transparent green plastic carrying case.

Based on the Old French word folie, for "madness," a folly is an extravagant structure built in a garden or park with no earthly purpose other than to entertain and impress. "Follies of Europe" tours some of the most eye-popping examples, many in gardens not open to the public. A Scottish estate is home to an 18th century pavilion shaped like a pineapple. In a suburb of Chartres, an early 20th century workman covered his house and garden buildings with pieces of broken glass and ceramic, creating whimsical pictures of European cathedrals. Towers, classical temples, and pyramids rise from the grounds of English parks.

There may be no more purely charming British artist and illustrator than Edward Bawden, whose long career is traced in the sumptuous "Edward Bawden and His Circle." In watercolors, book illustrations, London Underground posters, Shell advertisements and wallpaper patterns, Bawden rendered a halcyon vision of English country life, a green and pleasant land of churchyards, overgrown gardens and bustling village streets. A more expansive look at the country's rich artistic heritage can be found in "The History of British Art," a collaboration between the Tate Britain and the Yale Center for British Art. A copiously illustrated collection of scholarly essays, this three-volume survey (the books are available individually or in a slipcased set) ranges from the Bayeux Tapestry to Chris Ofili, with stops at Turner, Hogarth and Lucien Freud along the way.

Finally, "Scrapbooks" is a tribute to the books we make ourselves. Graphic designer Jessica Helfand has amassed an eclectic collection of scrapbooks, most from the early 20th century. These books are treasurehouses of old photographs, pressed flowers, ticket stubs, newspaper clippings, postcards, airplane tickets and party invitations. They narrate crushes, courtships, travels, losses in wartime. Each one tells the story of a human life; collectively, they paint an intriguing and generous panorama of American life.

Copyright © 2008, [Newsday Inc.](#)