

Illustrated Books for Christmas: Give the Big Picture



DANCE AND PHOTOGRAPHY. By William A. Ewing. (Holt, \$50.) William Ewing's primary interest in photographs of dance lies neither in performance

Grace Jones in body paint and costume by Keith Haring, photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe, 1984.

preservation nor in star adulation but in something more profound: the craft, sensuality and intelligence framed within each individual image. The author presents more than 200 full-page exquisitely reproduced images by such artists as Brassai, Genthe, Steichen, Man Ray, Degas, Nadar and Walker Evans, all of them connected by the subject of dance — primitive, avant-garde, spontaneous, classical. Mr. Ewing's thoughtful essay traces the history of dance through its great innovators — Marie Taglioni, Isadora Duncan, Nijinsky, Martha Graham, Balanchine — alongside the development of the photograph from the first attempts by Daguerre in the early 19th century to the highly refined but sometimes less imaginative techniques used by photographers today. The wonderful paradox of dance photography — the recording of movement by freezing it — is outlined with vivid force. But the reproductions, some familiar, many not, speak for themselves: the wit of George Platt Lynes's portrait of the young Balanchine as a deity of carpentry; the perverse horror of Duncan peacefully poised in a car, wearing the scarf that strangled her; the intensity of Rudolf Nureyev's hips and legs, photographed by Irving Penn, tells the whole powerful story of this dancer and of the classical dance discipline. The boldness of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn implanting themselves in the landscapes of Yosemite's natural wonders is awesome, amusing and American. And there are the quieter moments: Anna Pavlova's neck inextricably entwined in a swan's, and the soft sexiness of Ginger Rogers's naked back draped in chiffon, photographed by Horst. The cumulative effect of this book is one of confirmation; nothing is more beautiful — or eccentric or entertaining — than the human body when it is shaped by its dancing spirit.

— Toni Bentley

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE: One Hundred Flowers. Edited by Nicholas Callaway. (Callaway Editions/Knopf, \$100.)

This collection of flower paintings, beautifully presented and exquisitely reproduced, is a revelation: first, because they have never been exhibited in their full array and, secondly, because the book allows the viewer to discover Georgia O'Keeffe's view of herself and her own sexuality and — more importantly — of nature. For a long time, what seemed most startling about the flower paintings was their presentation of female sexuality — the flower as metaphor for the vagina and as passageway into the "mystery of life." Now I realize that that is only the most superficial reading of the flower motif in O'Keeffe's work. Of course, these are sexually charged images but that is primarily because we are not familiar or yet comfortable with "the world according to women." O'Keeffe may have initially found the flower an appropriate vehicle for her own flowering as a woman but the paintings, the majority done from 1918 to 1932, evolved into a body of work which presented not only a radical view of female sexuality, but also a radical exploration of nature itself. Historically, men have dominated nature while women have been identified with it. O'Keeffe translated that identification into a series of images that celebrates nature's abundance and its glory, and shows us both its power and its fragility. Beholding O'Keeffe's flowers is like beholding life itself; they are both knowable and mysterious. To me, the most important aspect of these paintings is their use of abstraction to convey precise emotional states. Until abstraction, we women artists could not speak directly through our art. It was O'Keeffe who changed that. She forged the realistic form of the



"Poppies," a 1950 oil on canvas.

flower into an icon of expressiveness and in so doing contributed to our understanding of women, of female sexuality and of nature, but, most significantly, she contributed to a different concept of what art is about.

— Judy Chicago



Gilt domes of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, foreground, in the Kremlin, Moscow.

THE KREMLIN: And Its Treasures. By Irina Rodimzeva, Nikolai Rachmanov and Alfons Raimann. (Rizzoli, \$75.)

Every year 20 million people visit the Kremlin. Four and a half million visit the Kremlin Museum, more than any other museum in the Soviet Union. It is one of the most famous architectural complexes in the world, its dazzling riches fabled since Ivan the Terrible and the 16th century. There have been many books showing the treasures of the Kremlin, including the first Western one by David Douglas Duncan, which some 30 years ago caused as much of a stir as if he had been permitted into the treasure rooms of Kublai Khan. There have been many others since, but this new book, magnificently photographed by Nikolai Rachmanov with a text by the Soviet expert Irina Rodimzeva and Alfons Raimann, an art restoration specialist, is the czar of them all. Showing the newly completed restorations of the Kremlin Museum, it takes you on a sumptuous tour spanning 15 centuries of treasures, through the palaces, the cathedrals, the dazzling collections of icons, Russian, European and Eastern armor from the 13th to the 19th centuries, the unparalleled Russian gold and silver jewelry collection, the mountain of silver ceremonial gifts brought by ambassadors and crowned heads from Europe, past the gold and silver vestments, the thrones, the jeweled crowns and regalia worn by Michael Romanov, his son Alexis and grandson Peter the Great, the Fabergé Easter eggs and into the coaches and carriage room. Curiously, the only thing not photographed clearly is the former Imperial Crown of Russia, first worn by Catherine the Great — an 18th-century jeweler's masterpiece with 5,012 diamonds and 86 matched pearls topped by a 415-carat ruby. Presumably it was judged so precious that even a Russian was not permitted to photograph it outside its guarded case. This book is a rich feast. If you can afford it, put it under the Christmas tree for your favorite Russophile.

— Suzanne Massie