

Made You Look

Amy Goldin: Art in a Hairshirt, Art Criticism 1964–1978

Essays by Amy Goldin, Robert Kushner, and others

Hard Press Editions, 220 pages, \$19.95



Amy Goldin in her boathouse in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, 1971.

Amy Goldin was a passionate, prickly, and deeply engaged voice for art publications (including this one) during the years when the formalist esthetics of Clement Greenberg's disciples were on the wane, and before the rise of the sort of multicultural stew her writing anticipated. A serious student of philosophy at the University of Chicago, she worked briefly as a painter in the late 1950s and early '60s. But according to Robert Kushner in his essay here, she "never seemed fully satisfied with her results and . . . quit painting because it was too painful."

Goldin was fearless in skewering some of the cultural heavyweights of her day, such as Harold Rosenberg, champion of Action Painting, and media guru Marshall McLuhan. In the process, she launched such prescient observations as this, written in 1966: "Painting, sculpture and theater melt into each other as the boundaries between the arts sag under the pressure of thrusts toward the stronger effects." She was equally adept at pithy statements that can stop you in your tracks: "German Expressionist painting is marvelous for people who don't like art." And the tartly turned barb: Fernand Léger "is always threatened by bloat and the muscle-bound cloddishness of a hung-over Mr. Clean."

But Goldin was above all a questing intellect and a

staunch advocate for what she saw as overlooked corners of the art world. In 1973, while in her late 40s, she commuted from New York to Harvard to take courses in Islamic art with scholar Oleg Grabar, and soon after she went on an extensive tour of Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. These endeavors led to eloquent defenses of decoration—ranging from rugs to Matisse cutouts—and to a dense, occasionally frustrating analysis in her essay "Patterns, Grids and Painting."

Art in a Hairshirt is a wonderful introduction to Goldin's career, which was cut short by cancer at 52, but the volume is marred by a shortage of illustrations. (Who, for example, remembers the artist Zuka? A review is included but with no reproductions of her work.) Nonetheless, through Goldin's writings and the interwoven appreciations from artists and fellow critics, a portrait of a lively and astute mind emerges.

—Ann Landi

TASK Master

Oliver Herring: TASK

Texts by Oliver Herring, Kendra Paitz, Ian Berry, and Kristen Hileman

University Galleries of Illinois State University, 176 pages, \$33

'Do something political." "Get everyone to run with scissors." "Cut a rug." "Climb the ladder of success." Such are the tasks one might pull from the basket at one of Oliver Herring's improvisational TASK events, in which participants interpret and act out their assignment before writing a new one to replenish the basket and perpetuate the cycle.

Through vivid photographs and thoughtful texts, *Oliver Herring: TASK* documents how Herring's concept of gathering groups to conceive and perform small missions—after the



An Oliver Herring TASK event at the University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2010.

artist has stocked the room with basic materials and props like paint, chairs, tape, cardboard, pens, foil, scissors, ladders, and string—has been enacted over the last decade in dozens of day-long events, with anywhere from ten to hundreds of participants at each one. “TASK appears on the surface like chaos but in reality almost everything is caused by design as a product of the aspirations toward either productivity or intimacy with other people,” Herring writes in his narrative on the project’s evolution.

With first-person accounts by participants and essays from curators at three host institutions, the book makes an eloquent case for the importance of giving people the opportunity to experiment creatively. “It was striking . . . how quickly average folks became artists,” writes Cary Levine, an organizer of a TASK party held at the University of North Carolina, where human chains were built, forts were defended, bodies were decorated, marriages were proposed, and songs were written and sung. Other contributors describe reconnecting with their childhoods, becoming less afraid of uncertainty, or discovering a love of reading aloud.

In the spirit of generosity underpinning all of Herring’s work, the book also serves as a blueprint for how other people can generate their own TASK parties. The artist provides a list of sample materials and strategies, and he even includes a waiver for future participants to sign. This book affirms Herring’s belief, which he has put to the test again and again, that art is something that can transform lives.

—*Hilarie M. Sheets*

Bey Watch

Dawoud Bey: Harlem, U.S.A.

Essays by Dawoud Bey, Matthew S. Witkovsky, and Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

Art Institute of Chicago, 88 pages, \$25

Known today for his sensitive, large-scale color portraits made with a view camera, Dawoud Bey began his career as a street photographer in Harlem. The neighborhood had a particular importance for Bey—his parents met there, and he visited often while growing up in Queens. In the mid-1970s, he writes, he became “a permanent fixture at the public events taking place in the community,” photographing the people he met on sidewalks and in shops. In 1979, his black-and-white series “Harlem, U.S.A.” was displayed at the Studio Museum in Harlem for his first solo show. Collected in this book and recently shown again at the Studio Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago, the images are still striking for the joy and grace Bey found in a neighborhood in upheaval.

Solidity pervades the portraits. Carefully dressed men and women participate in public life—playing in marching bands, watching parades, or running a bake sale. They lean on their environs, placing their hands on restaurant coun-



Dawoud Bey, *A Man in a Bowler Hat*, 1976.

ters, revival-tent poles, and police barricades. A man in a peaked hat and tie drapes an arm over his shiny tuba. A barber grasps his chair. “The touch lends a sense of gravity, it binds the subjects to their surroundings, and the photographer to his subjects,” writes fellow photographer Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts. And many faces smile, a rare sight in documentary street photography.

While there is a posed quality to a lot of the portraits here, others appear more quickly captured. One shows a young woman standing in a doorway, her hands clasped at her waist. The image recalls Henri Cartier-Bresson’s glamorous 1947 *Easter Sunday in Harlem*, notes curator Matthew S. Witkovsky in his essay. In both pictures, the women wear high, white silk collars, their heads turned slightly to strong sunlight—even the glass panes in the doors behind them match, although the paint is chipped in the 1976 image. Looking back, Bey writes, “Harlem was then a place where the present intermingled more visibly with Harlem’s original heyday.” In Bey’s photos, time passes and also doesn’t pass.

—*Rebecca Robertson*

Go Figure

Rosa Loy & Neo Rauch: Hinter den Gärten

Texts by Tilo Baumgärtel, Karlheinz Essl, Günther Oberhollenzer, and Bernhart Schwenk

Prestel, 160 pages, \$49.95

Rosa Loy and her longtime husband, Neo Rauch, have each invented a unique figurative vocabulary. Both painters often depict solemn beings performing mysterious tasks and rituals, and they both thwart traditional perspective to convey stillness within a kind of chaos. But Loy’s works tend to highlight confident female narratives, while Rauch’s seem to represent a world on the brink of collapse. This handsome volume encapsulates the couple’s show last