

*Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, Hogeschool Gent, Jan Delvinlaan 115, 9000 Gent, Belgium. E-mail: <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.*

This is the original soundtrack of *Step across the Border*—a 90-minute documentary film about Fred Frith by Nicolas Humbert and Werner Penzel, with Iva Bittova, Hans Bruniussen, Tom Cora, Tina Cuffan, Jean Derome, Pavel Fajt, Eino Haapala, Haco, Eitetsu Hayashi, Tim Hodgkinson, Lasse Hollmer, Bill Laswell, René Lussier, Fred Maher, Kevin Norton, Bob Ostertag, Zeena Parkins and John Zorn.

Here are more than 70 minutes of music from the broad palette of Fred Frith and some of his friends, improvisations and songs, woven together with sounds from the many places in which he found himself during the shooting of the documentary: a soundtrack to accompany images of journeys and arrivals, rehearsals and concerts, roads and rails, fields and streets. However, this recording is not just a soundtrack: it exists separately in its own right. Learning from the process of filmmaking, Frith has re-worked and developed the sound material from the film in order to create a narrative structure that parallels and complements the original. Understanding that the music of “Step Across the Border” should be supportive of the image, he works here to re-create new images of music for your eyes. (Quote from <www.fred-frith.com>.)

The narrative structure of this work is, however, a weakness as well as a strength. Each individual track or song lacks scope and meaning in itself. They are nice but anecdotal patches, stitched together by an invisible—and in this case “unhearable”—thread. Listeners have the impression they are invited to use their imagination to rebuild the story and not to construct one of several possible stories, but they are not given the means to reconstruct the original nor the freedom to create a story of their own. This in-between position leads us away from the music and makes it quasi-impossible to appreciate it fully. Conversely, the songs themselves seem to struggle with a similar dilemma: they lack the freedom to have their own logic or center, and yet they are overloaded with potential and functionality.

Another quote from the web site says:

In “Step Across the Border” Fred Frith states that Art, for him, is not a question of originality but of freeing one-

self. He wants to reach out to people, to change them, and he wants them to be alert, to listen. “Looking back at my songs I find they are very often about apathy” he says. “And apathy is the biggest obstacle in the way of change.”

Surely, apathetic listeners will miss the point of this record entirely. It takes at least three or four concentrated hearings before the narrative unfolds and the structure reveals itself. Unfortunately, people who are willing to take the time to do this will end up with a feeling of having been taken out on a leash. They will have taken a step across the border, only to find themselves and the music tethered.

## BOOKS

### ARRANGING THINGS: A RHETORIC OF OBJECT PLACEMENT

by Leonard Kohen; paintings by Nathalie Du Pasquier. Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, CA, U.S.A., 2003. 127 pp., illus. Paper. ISBN: 1-880656-82-5.

*Reviewed by Margaret Dolinsky, School of Fine Arts, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47408, U.S.A. E-mail: <dolinsky@indiana.edu>.*

Privately, author Leonard Kohen introduces his book *Arranging Things: A Rhetoric of Object Placement* as an addition in the “Dick and Jane” series of reading primers.

Dismayed by the foundations of art and design history that have resulted in lexicons, theories and principles, Kohen states: “Presumably these words and phrases are useful to some, yet for me they fail to convincingly identify principles operating within effective arrangements” (pp. 23–24). Dismissing arrangement according to the art world, he turns his direction to the “real world,” despite admitting that the two appear quite similar at times. One is distinguished from the other in a footnote list that includes:

real world: Arrangements have to interact with real things in the real, immediate environment.

art world: Artworks are part of a self-contained conceptual system set apart from the real world.

Kohen models his solution on a mini-history of rhetoric in order to outline eight principles for a rhetoric of arrangement. These include physicality (hierarchy, alignment, sensorality), abstraction (metaphor, mystification, narrative) and integration (coherence, resonance) (p. 41).

The book is generously illustrated with paintings of everyday objects by Nathalie Du Pasquier, which the author cleverly repeats in miniature at the back of the book and describes through his principles. This self-proclaimed primer on arranging 3D objects includes descriptions, for example, on sensorality: “The tall objects are minimally detailed, vertically oriented shapes. The short objects are more articulated, idiosyncratic, squat shapes. Altogether, each object in the arrangement is of a distinctly different type and shape” (p. 86).

Although the analysis of arrangement through paintings may appear ironic in a discussion of arranging objects in the real world, Kohen explains their use in another footnote:

There are, however, certain pedagogical benefits to slightly ambiguous visual information. If the paintings were too realistic and detailed, you, the reader, might be seduced by the fascinating intricacies of the objects themselves and lose sight of the relationship of the objects to each other—the way they are arranged—which is the focus of this book (p. 108).

Other works by the author include *WET: The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing* (1976–1981), *Wabi-Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* and *Undesigning the Bath*.

### PICTURING EXTRATERRESTRIALS: ALIEN IMAGES IN MODERN CULTURE

by John F. Moffitt. Prometheus Books, Amherst, NY, 2003, U.S.A. 595 pp., illus. ISBN: 1-57392-990-5.

*Reviewed by Dene Grigar, Texas Woman's University. E-mail: <dgrigar@twu.edu>.*

One can only imagine John F. Moffitt's chagrin over the fact that his book *Picturing Extraterrestrials: Alien Images in Modern Culture* is paired with Ronald Story's *Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters* at Amazon.com, for Moffitt spends 556 pages in his own tome lambasting the kind of fanciful encounters included in Story's book. But having ploughed through the former,

readers would consider its pairing with the latter an inspired act of Dantean contrapasso on the part of the on-line book company in just punishment for Moffitt's many ad hominem attacks on subjects and persons such as Frisbees and Princess Diana, spiteful comments about his literary rivals, snobbish presentation of his material, gross generalizations and occasional factual errors. Why would anyone want to spend a hard-earned \$30 to find out halfway through the book that the author considers his readers to be a bunch of buffoons (p. 242)?

What could have been a brilliant argument against and critical approach to countering the growing body of non-documented "evidence" for those contemporary myths we have come to know as "The Aliens Living among Us" and "The Aliens in Flying Saucers Who Abduct and Experiment on Humans" devolves into a diatribe against the lower middle class (pp. 27–28, 128), cyberspace (p. 37), television (p. 47), and capitalism (p. 125), to name but a few targets.

Moffitt loses his way early on. His thesis, a good one, is that contemporary images of extraterrestrials are based upon previous concepts relating to occultism, religiosity and psychological phenomena, among other factors. To his credit, the scholarship strongly bears out his argument. So, one has to wonder why, with such good evidence to support his claim, he lapses—starting on page 24—into a derisive manner and outright snobbery. In the book we learn that the area in Canada where famous abductees Betty and Barney Hill were traveling is the "boondocks" (p. 148), Barney Hill is "hen-pecked" (p. 154), women writing to General Mills for information about recipes wrote "chatty" letters (p. 91), abductee Peter is a "space cadet" (p. 81), Star Trek uniforms are "cheesy" (pp. 165, 167), and hypnotists are "demented jockeys" (p. 219). The list goes on ad infinitum.

As if to free himself from the awful chains of civility, Moffitt admits to the reader that he is "not a gentleman" (p. 170). On the one hand, readers may see Moffitt's rudeness as a loss of patience for those who live, to quote the well-known adage of Socrates, "the unexamined life." But, on the other, readers can just as easily smell another motive: he acts as a provocateur in order to gain notoriety and sell more books. The answer lies in who his audience really is. If, indeed, as Moffitt supposes, the audience is composed of a bunch of

louts, then this review will move a few extra units for him (though most probably not enough to put him in the range of his hated rival, mentioned on page 83, who earned \$250,000 for his book, but certainly a few more than the \$2,000 in royalties Moffitt has earned for his). If the audience is, indeed, a scholarly one coming from disciplines such as art history, cultural studies and the like, then perhaps such a tactic will fail. The fanciful cover of the alien in Mona Lisa drag and the rancorous introduction may put off a few people.

Two erroneous bits of information presented in the book need to be clarified. First, Moffitt's retelling of Euripides' play, *The Bacchae*, is incorrect: the bacchantes did not pursue and tear apart the god Dionysos, and Orpheus did not stand in for the god in this play. Pentheus the king was the targeted victim, and he was purposely set up by Dionysos in retaliation for Pentheus's impiety toward the god and the god's mother (p. 192). Orpheus is associated with Dionysos in Greek mythology and was reported in some stories to have been torn to pieces by the maenads, but in Euripides' story, he does not appear. Second, the proper ending for the Greek sigma at the end of a word is not s (as in the word "angels" found on page 207) but s. One would think that, before cruelly critiquing other people's facts and needlessly peppering one's pages with a gross number of foreign terms, an author would make sure his own facts are correct.

### ISAMU NOGUCHI AND MODERN JAPANESE CERAMICS: A CLOSE EMBRACE OF THE EARTH

by Louise Allison Cort and Bert Winther-Tamaki. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, U.S.A., 2003. 240 pp., illus. ISBN: 0-520-23923-7.

*Reviewed by Rob Harle, PO Box 182, Nimbri 2480 NSW, Australia. E-mail: <recluse@lis.net.au>.*

This is an excellent book. Just as Noguchi himself successfully crossed boundaries and cultures, this book succeeds admirably in crossing the boundaries of the lavish coffee-table presentation, the studio artist's resource book and an extremely well-researched academic critique of, mostly, post-war Japanese ceramic art.

Lavishly illustrated in both color and black and white, the book will appeal to

casual art lovers as well as serious ceramic students, teachers and researchers. The illustrations are not only of the stunning works by the various represented artists, but also of the artists at work in their studios, especially Noguchi, together with some wonderful personal photos.

The main intellectual component of *Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics* consists of four major essays, which make exciting reading. Winther-Tamaki's essay looks at factors that shaped Noguchi's "'embrace' of Japanese earth as a medium of modern sculpture and design" (p. xi). Ryu considers the broader milieu of early post-war Japan and discusses not only ceramics, sculpture and pottery but also the associated disciplines of architecture, graphic design and landscape design. He then analyzes the positions and work of many ceramicists with whom Noguchi interacted. Cort's essay extends the investigation of the Japanese artists and the philosophy they expounded in their use of clay and "its potential for meaning." Althshuler's essay explores ways Noguchi's work with clay and its critical appraisal, especially in the U.S., was driven by his attitudes towards art-making and national identity.

The latter was never far from Noguchi's mind, as he was essentially an outsider, at the start, in the world of Japanese ceramics and pottery. Perhaps, like David Suzuki, this cross-cultural inheritance generates a unique vision that allows such individuals to excel in their chosen fields. And like Suzuki, Noguchi never quite "fitted neatly" into either the American style or the Japanese. Suzuki once said that because he looked Japanese and spoke like a North American he was not easily and naturally accepted in either culture.

Throughout the book the emphasis is on critically exploring dichotomies such as "pottery/sculpture, handicraft/industrial design, avant-gardism/academicism, native/foreign and tradition/modernity" (p. xi), which confronted both Noguchi and his Japanese clay-working colleagues. Noguchi interestingly made pottery only in Japan. "I have only made pottery in Japan, never elsewhere. I think the earth here and the sentiment are suited to pottery" (p. 1). These works were almost entirely created in three intense periods; 5 months in Kyoto in 1931, 1 week in Seto in 1950 and a couple of months in Bizen in 1952. It is