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The End of Art by Donald Kuspit

Review by: Robert Radford

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managed to turn his Yorkshire seat into a local power-base from which to exercise the political influence that he derived from his friend and mentor, the Marquess of Rockingham.

In her essay on the various architects responsible for the building and transformation of Newby Hall into an epitome of high Neo-classical fashion, Eileen Harris provides an important revision of one of the best chapters in her recent book *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (2001). By candidly confessing that she had been led into an error by failing to question an assumption that designs drawn in the hand of the local architect William Belwood were necessarily of his invention, she also gives a vivid demonstration of how tricky architectural drawings are to interpret, and also how vital it is for the historian that they are preserved wherever possible with all the documents to which they relate.

Ruth Guilding similarly builds on her recent research into the display of sculpture collections in Britain and offers a clear and readable account of the genesis, arrangement and use of the Newby Hall Sculpture Gallery, which is undoubtedly the house's most interesting interior. Guilding's essay has the merit of being the only one in which Weddell's Grand Tour haul of nineteen crates of sculpture and other works of art are 'unpacked' for us to see. Guilding and Bristol and Low raise, but do not answer, the interesting question of how typical Weddell was as a collector given his class, background and nouveau-riche circumstances. Martin Myrone's essay takes this issue head on by interpreting Weddell's alignment with advanced Neo-classical taste in Italy as a consequence not of his personal predilections, but rather of a 'class' need to negotiate increasing ambivalence in certain educated sections of English society over the validity of the Grand Tour ethic, especially in the light of the general rush of Britons to the Continent that followed the signing of the Treaty of Paris in February 1763. Weddell's own thoughts on the matter are not recorded however, and Myrone's attempt to extrapolate these from those expressed by Thomas Robinson (Weddell's kinsman and neighbour at Newby Park) during the latter's own, slightly earlier, Grand Tour of 1759–61, failed to convince this reviewer.

NICK SAVAGE

Henry Moore: Critical Essays. Edited by Jane Beckett and Fiona Russell. 288 pp. with 85 b. & w. ills. (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003), £52.50. ISBN 0-7546-0836-0.

This volume is part of a new series designated 'Subject/Object: New Studies in Sculpture' which, as the frontispiece statement puts it, 'will provide a forum for the publication and stimulation of new research examining sculpture's relationship with the world around it, with other disciplines and other material contexts'. A volume on Rodin and Britain has already been published and others are in preparation. The present book, which grew out of a conference held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, in 1998, contains an introduction and eleven essays, ranging from a discussion of Moore's studio and home by Jon Wood, to an essay on Moore's architectural commissions by Margaret Garlake, and one on Moore and Poland by Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius. As always with publications originating in conference papers, the book is a mixed bag, with huge areas of Moore's practice overlooked (the early carvings and the late monumental bronzes, for example) in favour of specific subjects which are examined in rigorously footnoted detail.

Moore's work of the Second World War is the subject of two essays: Andrew Causey's 'Henry Moore and the Uncanny', which deals with the drawings and the sculpture of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and Lyndsey Stonebridge's essay on Moore and his exact contemporary, the child-psychanalyst Donald Winnicott. Causey makes some very perceptive comments on the difference between Moore's 'Ideas for sculpture' drawings and the sculptures he actually made, while Stonebridge highlights some remarkable parallels between the sculptor and the psychoanalyst (Winnicott

was concerned with classic Moore subjects such as the mother, the shell, and dark, enclosed spaces). But like the proverbial Chinese takeaway, although both essays are crammed with delicious morsels, they leave the reader still feeling slightly unsatisfied at the end. This is an inherent flaw with publications of conference papers and is not a comment on the standard of these essays, which is very high.

Having said this, Iain A. Boal's essay on *Atom piece* (unveiled in 1966 as a commission to commemorate the first nuclear chain reaction which took place at the University of Chicago in 1942) is a notable contribution to Moore studies. He shows conclusively that the huge, domed bronze cannot have been inspired by the elephant skull that Moore owned (the maquette was complete before the skull had arrived in Britain), and he also highlights a remarkable similarity between the bronze and a poster issued by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Moore had flirted with Communism in the 1930s and was a supporter of CND, yet he was happy to commemorate the birth of nuclear weapons. Moore's pleasant, avuncular manner may have fooled the commissioners into thinking they were getting a simple monument, but it is nothing of the kind. It is an apocalyptic fusion of skull, mushroom cloud and helmet, all conspiring to suggest massive latent energy. The different requirements of commissioner and sculptor are reflected in the title: officially it is *Nuclear energy*, while Moore preferred the double entendre present in *Atom piece*. The conference paper format is perfectly suited to the discussion of a single work, while at the same time it allows sufficient space for the author to open doors on some major issues.

Robert Burstow's essay on Moore's attitude towards the open air, not only as a site for sculpture but also as an aesthetic grounded in his love of the Yorkshire landscape, is also thought-provoking. The contrast between the English fondness for green spaces, gentle country walks and swimsuits worn with socks and sandals (see the illustration on p.160), and the moralistic, muscular ethos of German *Freikörperkultur*, is marked indeed. Somehow, Moore's work embodies and even glorifies that very English mentality.

PATRICK ELLIOTT

The Afterlife of Gardens. By John Dixon Hunt. 256 pp. with 70 b. & w. ills. (Reaktion Books, London, 2004), £25. ISBN 1-86189-218-7.

This book is a collection of essays that focuses on how gardens and other kinds of designed landscapes have been experienced or received. Hunt, a longstanding champion of lively intellectual discourse in landscape history, argues for the reception, or 'afterlife', of sites rather than the processes of their design and implementation: a reception study of landscape architecture offers 'exciting and fresh perspectives on garden culture by exploring how sites are experienced, often through a *longue durée* of existence, change and reformulation'. Although the application of this literary canon is not new in the context of landscape history, it is encouraging to find a book which charts how a range of gardens from different epochs and countries has been experienced by generations of visitors, and how they have been interpreted and redesigned in their imaginative and cultural responses. Hunt's book is not, however, aimed primarily at landscape historians, but at aspiring and practising professional landscape architects – those who have 'inventive, intelligent and imaginative ways of arriving at their designs', but who often pay 'little attention' to how their work – or indeed the work of others before them – will be received once something like it is built. Those readers who have a practical working knowledge as well as a conceptual appreciation of landscape may take issue with some of the author's arguments. Hunt, however, aims to be controversial, and his impassioned narrative will doubtless compel many to question their methods of interpreting and experiencing landscapes.

TODD LONGSTAFFE-GOWAN

The End of Art. By Donald Kuspit. 224 pp. with 41 b. & w. ills. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004), £25/\$28. ISBN 0-521-83252-7.

This book is a polemic directed at the decadent state of contemporary art. Kuspit charts what he sees as being a seemingly unstoppable course of decline, 'the regression from high art to nonart, that is the end of art'. There are two phases to this degenerative process. The first results from the entropic nature of the modernist project itself and particularly the engagement with everyday life signalled by Manet and Baudelaire, and second, the onset of the 'post-aesthetic' phase, heralded by Allan Kaprow and celebrated by Andy Warhol, which still dominates the culture and, emphatically, the marketing of art today. It soon emerges that the definitive constituent of art, the golden essence that has been squandered and is in danger of becoming irrevocably lost, is its aesthetic function. The relationship between the artist and the spectator should be one of intense psychological exchange in which the expressive output of the artist stimulates a creative interpretation from the spectator. Art should be preserved as a privileged place for contemplation – the territory of the unconscious. The pathological forces that have hastened this regression within modernism and its aftermath are nihilism, banality and the blurring between art and life. Necessarily, Duchamp is examined for his part in this process of loss and the author's psychological perspective does not flinch in adducing envy (of Matisse and Picasso) as a determining motive in his case. Kuspit's most sustained attack, however, is reserved for the art of the last three decades that has concerned itself with various political agendas, and many readers might find his unqualified dismissal of the likes of Barbara Kruger or Leon Golub as particularly difficult to accept. He seems unwilling to grant to art any other historical need than that of the restorative quality of beauty.

There is something heroic in the action of a critic of long experience and international recognition laying himself open, like some latter-day Canute, to a charge of absurd and reactionary futility, by enunciating such an extreme and widely sweeping dismissal of the art of his own time. However, like Ruskin or Berger, in their different ways, the force of Kuspit's conviction deserves considered reflection. This is, after all, no ill-informed, journalistic rant but a copiously argued complaint, drawing support from an informed reading of aesthetics and psychology to complement his close observation of the contemporary art scene. Much of the credibility of Kuspit's position depends on his proposed solutions and he responds by identifying a number of artists whom he recruits as the 'New Old Masters', a muster call, with Lucian Freud and Avigdor Arikha as seniors, Sean Scully and Eric Fischl representing a middle generation, and Jenny Saville, April Gornik, Don Eddy and Michael David among the younger artists appointed to carry the flag for art's salvation.

ROBERT RADFORD

The Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin. Edited by Claude Keisch. 128 pp. incl. 140 col. pls. (Scala Publishers, London, 2005), £14.95. ISBN 1-85758-337-5.

Berlin's Altesmuseum, designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel, was reopened in 2001, its magnificently restored interiors accommodating works from the late eighteenth to the very early twentieth centuries. This catalogue is an abbreviated but satisfying introduction to the collections, edited by a former curator at the Gallery.

Irish Museum of Modern Art. The Collection. Edited by Marguerite O'Molloy. 224 pp. incl. 323 col. pls. + 12 b. & w. ills. (Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2005), €45. ISBN 1-903811-48-1.

This is a full-colour publication presenting a broad, annotated selection of the Museum's holdings. Also included are essays on the history of Dublin's Royal Hospital building (since 1991 the home of IMMA), and on the history of the collection itself.

J.-P.S.