

MODERN PAINTERS

ART | ARCHITECTURE | DESIGN | PERFORMANCE | FILM

■ BOOKS



Three Images: Daniel Gordon, *Untitled*, 2003.



FLYING PICTURES BY DANIEL GORDON, INTRODUCTION BY GREGORY CREWDSON, POWERHOUSE BOOKS



Members of Future Academy Dakar, July 2003.

ART SCHOOL (PROPOSITIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY) EDITED AND INTRODUCTION BY STEVEN HENRY MADOFF, MIT PRESS



Salvador Dalí, *Fifty Abstract Paintings ...*, 1962.

THE INFINITY OF LISTS: AN ILLUSTRATED ESSAY BY UMBERTO ECO, RIZZOLI



Chris Ofili, *Pimpin' Ain't Easy*, 1997.

CHRIS OFILI CONTRIBUTIONS BY DAVID ADJAYE, THELMA GOLDEN, O ENWEZOR, PETER DOIG, AND KARA WALKER, RIZZOLI

FOUR BOOKS THAT CONSIDER THE FUTURE OF ART

To be an artist in the 21st century means traveling through unexplored terrain. Four powerful and important new volumes help the reader navigate this landscape by investigating how art is produced, received, and enjoyed in the post-Duchamp world.

"A gauntlet and perhaps in some ways a series of alternative blueprints" is how Steven Henry Madoff describes the theoretical and practical propositions in *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*. Madoff's challenge: reconceptualizing an ethics of knowledge that may, even if only momentarily, assist students, artists, and teachers in understanding the flow of cultural and artistic capital. Letters, essays, and dialogues forge conversations that transcend rhetoric. Declarations such as "Art schools have not always existed, and nothing says that they must always exist," by the theorist Thierry de Duve, help frame responses from artists like Mike Kelley and Ann Hamilton. Intellectual rigor secures the volume's foundation, but its charm lies in the renegade creativity of its contributors and in Madoff's sincere curiosity.

Wonder and innocence motivated the recent Yale School of Art graduate and photographer Daniel Gordon to create *Flying Pictures*. Armed with nothing but courage, his camera, and long underwear, he spent 2001 to 2004 in New York's Hudson Valley and Northern California's Bay Area in front of his tripod shooting his leaps into the air in 125ths of a second. He flies over lush green grass and snowy and barren fields, often alongside electric wires and asphalt roads. Each of the resulting 26 four-color and black-and-white photos faces a blank page, making the visual experience poetic and profound. "They capture suspended moments, perfectly situated between transcendence and doom," says Yale School of Art professor and photographer Gregory Crewdson in his introduction. The volume is a metaphor for art that isn't clichéd or sentimental but hopeful.

Asking for another kind of artistic leap of faith is the book *Ofili*. Elephant dung and cutouts of female genitals carefully positioned on a black woman—there you have Chris Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary*. Although the artist claims his work was not designed to offend, *Ofili*—with its lavish, full-page color photos of subversive installations accompanied by responses from the contemporary-art community—suggests otherwise. Exploring hip-hop, African art, and the boundaries of Western traditions, Ofili is a trickster who incites with humor, metaphor, and reconfigured images, explains Carol Becker, dean of the School of the Arts at Columbia University. Authors ranging from the artist Kara Walker to historians and curators deal with Ofili's assaults on nationalism, religious fanaticism, and racism. But it's architect David Adjaye who conjures Ofili's nuance, revealing the spirituality of their collaboration on an exhibition space—unexpected from an artist associated with the profane.

Ofili demonstrates the fluidity of art. The Italian philosopher Umberto Eco asks how we categorize it. Homer, Rabelais, Dalí, Shakespeare, Kant, Rubens, Joyce, Warhol, and Goya are just a few of the names in Eco's compendium of visual and literary splendors and lions, *The Infinity of Lists*. Prompted by an invitation from the Louvre to create a series of lectures and symposia, Eco meditated on lists, medieval to postmodern, and their pleasures. The result is a 21-chapter compilation of poetic, practical, popular, and chaotic enumerations, accompanied by extensive excerpts from primary texts and illustrations ranging from Achilles's shield to Joseph Cornell boxes. Eco's thoughts echo our thinking about art in this time of rapid change and an excess of information: "[T]his search for lists was a most exciting experience not so much for what we managed to include in this volume as for all the things that had to be left out." —Joanne Molina