

A Guidebook for a Place To Go in One's Mind

by Tee A. Corinne

It seems to me to be a wonderful time in which to be a woman artist: feminism has made a change in the art world (I can remember what it was like before) and the power of women networking, sharing ideas and information and writing about each other's work is strong in ways that were hard to imagine twenty-five years ago. Regionalism, pluralism and a respect for content are all ascending and these are good signs for women artists who are often perceived as a different region by established art interests.

It is a credit to the persistence of our nineteenth century foremothers that women have equal access to art education even if we



(Museum photo from the book)

haven't yet managed financial parity in the gallery/museum juggernaut.

The new National Museum of Women in the Arts which opened in April in Washington, D.C., has caused a flurry of media interest in women in the arts: debates, arguments, should there be such a place, shouldn't there, etc. I think the attention is wonderful. People are dragging out the statistics and looking at them again, noticing that there are still huge gaps and inequalities in who gets collected, included in gallery and museum shows, publicized, made the subject of books.

It seems to me that the new museum is the result of many dreams focusing on the same need at the same time. It was created out of a leap of faith, exists as a place to go in the mind as well as in reality. I think it will function as a locus of activity and research, a stimulant, a pilgrimage site. It gives us art from a women's eyes view. It doesn't matter how similar or different these images are to works by men. What really matters is noticing that women did them, learning the women artists' names, finding more of their work,

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS, edited by Margaret B. Rennolds (Harry N. Abrams, 253 pp. \$35.00).

moving women from the periphery to the center of our consideration.

Coinciding with the opening of the museum, the publishing house of Harry N. Abrams has brought out an impressive book titled *NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS*, 253 pages, large format, glossy paper, bright color, crisp reproductions. Two hundred and thirty works of art from the museum's permanent collection are reproduced, sixty-nine in color, accompanied by text and a contemporary image of each artist.

All the pictures are beautiful.

Alessandra Comini's introduction is thought-provoking and offers many answers to the question "Why a National Museum of Women in the Arts?" Comini in her summation notes that the permanent collection insures "that the whole story of art be told.... It presents not a footnote to the history of art, but a supplement; not a ghetto, but an extension."

What's best about this book is the reproductions of artwork and the likenesses of the artists. The text is strongest in presenting the larger world in which the artists lived and worked. There are, however, confusing inconsistencies when discussing artists' personal lives. Children are mentioned with no notation about whether or not the artist had married. Sometimes marriages are cited but not subsequent divorces or widowhoods. The beginning of Gabriele Nunter's affair with Kandinsky is highlighted, but not the end which had a devastating effect on her work.

The details of artists' lives make them more memorable, help lodge the artists in our minds. When individual particularities are glossed over, as they are in this text, the artists become homogenized, lose some of their uniqueness and their power.

For anyone interested specifically in work by lesbian artists this collection has a few delights. But, missing are examples of the work of Harriet Hosmer, Romaine Brooks, Emma Stebbins, Alice Austen, Edmonia Lewis, Emma Jane Gaye, Edith Watson, Florence Wyle, Frances Loring, Anee Whitney, and Gluck. One cannot tell from the text that any of the artists who are mentioned might be lesbian.

The treatment of Rosa Bonheur is a case in point. The collection of the museum includes a drawing and a painting by Bonheur, both of sheep. The accompanying text describes Bonheur as leading an "unconventional life-style... She smoked cigarettes in public, rode astride, and wore her hair

short. From her teens, she favored men's attire." Of Bonheur's fifty-three year alliance with Nathalie Micas or of her passionate involvement with the younger American painter, Anna Klumpke, there is not one word. One of Klumpke's paintings of Bonheur is reproduced as a "contemporary" image of the artist. It was done with a loving eye.

I keep asking, "Is this really important?" And answering, "Yes, it is."

As I've searched, as an artist and a lover of women, for role models, I've found the things unsaid to be continually frustrating and disorienting. I remember my elation on reading James Saslow's article "Closets in the Museum" in *LAVENDER CULTURE* (JAY AND YOUNG, JOVE/HBJ) that George Dyer was Frances Bacon's lover. Bacon's portraits of George Dyer's death suddenly exploded with meaning for me. Saslow points out that information about relationships "calls our attention to a potential layer of meaning in the work." Although this layer is less obvious in Bonheur's portraits of sheep, I sometimes wonder if she chose to work with animal imagery because it would tell less about her than human scenes might.

Some of Berenice Abbott's photographs in the museum collection are also of variant interest. In the main body of the book is one of her portraits of the bisexual poet Edna St. Vincenty Millay wearing a necktie and looking rather sad; though the print quality is gorgeous.

Further in the book is an Abbott photo of Janet Flanner wearing an embroidered blouse. Flanner wrote for the *New Yorker* for fifty years using the pen name Genet. Some of her correspondence and a wonderful group of scrapbooks about her are housed in the "Flanner/Solano Papers" in the Library of Congress. More letters appear in *DARLINGHISSIMA* (MURRAY, RANDOM HOUSE)—witty, romantic, intelligent and charming.

The museum book also contains Abbott's grand photo of Djuna Barnes in profile: troublesome Djuna who claimed she wasn't really a lesbian, she just made a fool of herself over Thelma Wood. Thelma Wood was also an artist. Their relationship lasted ten years.

Included also is Louis Abbema's "Portrait of a Young Girl in Blue Ribbon," a pastel of a pouty, serious looking child. Abbema, who was French and a close friend of Sarah Bernhardt, wore fancy male attire, smoked cigars, and was quite public in the

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expression of her lesbianism.

Finally there is Gwen John, who spent most of her adult life in Paris. John was known for her passionate attachments to both men and women and ultimately to the Catholic Church. She is represented by two pieces: a charcoal of a surly looking young woman and a water color of a woman, in profile, holding a missal near an empty chair. Who were these women, how did they relate to John's life?

More questions arise about what may have been left out. What was the nature of Ellen Day Hale's relationship with Gabrielle de Veaux Clements with whom she studied and later lived? So much as been left unsaid.

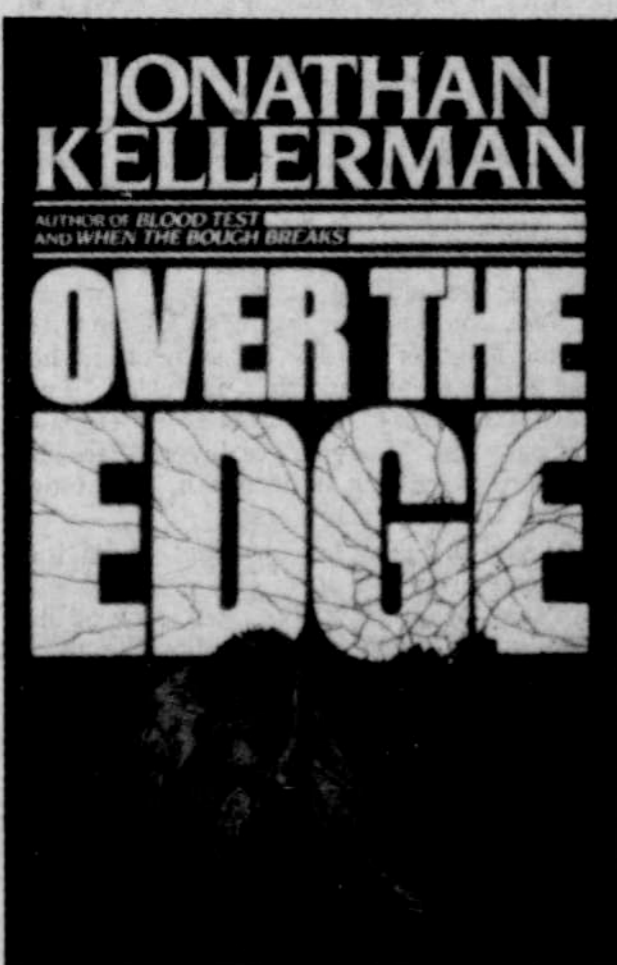


(Portrait from the dust jacket)

On the other hand, that leaves us so much more to do which brings me back to the existence of the museum, its library, its power to inspire directly, through making originals available, and indirectly, through publications, posters, cards, etc. It is fulfilling all of these functions. If I ask for more, it is to insure that the new plenitude extends to all women and embraces all of our varieties.

Should you buy this book, it's a bargain. Many of the pictures and much of the text is not available elsewhere. Hopefully each artist will have a book of her own, soon. It is all very exciting.

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A Lavender Slasher, A Crimson Edge

OVER THE EDGE, by Jonathan Kellerman (Atheneum, 373 pp. \$17.95)

by Jack Garman

Three-fifteen a.m. Dr. Alex Delaware, semi-retired psychologist, gets an emergency call from a past patient, Jamey Cadmus, a 19-year-old, gay super-genius. Word salad. Hallucinations. On the lam, Jamey is reaching out for sanctuary from himself, his voices, his tormentors. The line goes dead.

The call leads Dr. D. (Jamey's by-name for Delaware) to a psychiatric hospital, its director who happens to be a pre-CIA mind drug researcher, and a family whose members include California land boom developers and flower child peace-niks, and whose destiny is somehow linked to an unconvicted Nazi war criminal. Jamey has escaped the hospital and been charged with the Lavender Slasher murders, a series of ritualistic sex slayings. This gallery of model citizens are all convinced of his guilt, by reason of insanity—but not Dr. D. He won't sign onto this legal defense team until he knows precisely about the game.

Dr. D. has the detachment of a lab-

bound scientist and the loving-kindness of the average saint. Ever sensitive to the slightest nuance, he keeps these seemingly contradictory aspects of character in perfect balance while meticulously pursuing the daunting checklist of damning evidence against Jamey. The director of the private hospital from which Jamey has escaped particularly worries Dr. D. A prominent psychiatrist who has advanced the science of psychopharmacology, he is exacting to the point of inhumanity. But does this automatically make him guilty of something nefarious? By itself, scientific precision is innocent; but it can be corrupted. Perhaps especially so when in proximity of the family lawyer, a transparent megalomaniac who owns entire boulevards of prime real estate. But is wealth an automatic indication of corruption? The lawyer's dedication to the care of two generations of Cadmuses is without obvious taint. In fact, convinced of Jamey's guilt, he fixes his sights on the young man's incarceration in a private facility where he would get the best care. A pretty compassionate guy, it seems.

These and other questions, answers, and further questions lead the good doctor, and the tantalized reader, through a labyrinth of doubts, false hopes, and inspired guesses. Along the way, one gets just enough back-story to remain ravenously curious, as if a smorgasbord is being served on tea saucers; because, as in the best fiction of this genre, Kellerman focuses on the case at hand and keeps the fecund undergrowth trimmed. The result is a gradually forming tragedy of the motives and milieu that have given rise to the convoluted series of events our psychologist-sleuth is unravelling.

With the cooperation of Milo Sturgis, a gay detective assigned to the Lavender Slasher killings and Delaware's best friend, details begin to appear, not as die-cast pieces of a gradually developing picture; but rather as part of an organic whole which shifts and clarifies as it grows along with the developing knowledge of Jamey's life. So, instead of watching the story as a spectator to a chess game, the reader learns what the doctor learns, formulating possibilities along with

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