HATJE CANTZ VERLAG

The Bauhaus in Calcutta: An Encounter of the Cosmopolitan Avant-Garde
EDITED BY REGINA BITTNER AND KATHRIN RHOMBERG

A book detailing a show of early Bauhaus artists held in Calcutta in 1922 barely requires further enticement. Fresh from a rapturous reception in Germany the previous year, Rabindranath Tagore helped young Austrian art historian Stella Kramrisch, a teacher at his university at Shantiniketan, to bring work by the core of the European avant-garde, including Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky and Johannes Itten, to exhibit alongside a ragbag of late Bengal School artists that encompassed a few masters such as Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. With no installation photographs and only one copy of the original catalog surviving, this austere, elegant volume, published alongside a show at Bauhaus Dessau, is a vital record of intertwining modernisms, unexpected diasporas, educational revivals and occasional misunderstandings across two continents. JJ

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of this article.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS

Gutai: Splendid Playground
EDITED BY MING TIAMPO AND ALEXANDRA MUNROE

This catalog of the groundbreaking show at New York’s Guggenheim Museum is a comprehensive study of the history, philosophy, works and legacy of the Gutai Art Association, one of the most influential artistic movements of postwar Japan. The book is organized thematically and chronologically, with dedicated chapters exploring Gutai’s experimental approach to material, concept, process, performativity and environment. Thoroughly researched essays by co-curators Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe argue against the notion of postwar modernism being a Western-specific phenomenon through close analyses of Gutai’s emergence and ascendency in the 1950s and 1960s. Richly illustrated, the publication also provides a generous survey of 120 objects by 25 artists—including lesser-known works alongside iconic pieces—as well as photographic documentation of the collective’s various exhibitions in Japan and abroad. HK

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method
JOAN KEE

Despite the daunting subtitle, this book offers a fastidiously constructed history of Korean art and politics from the 1950s to the 1990s and beyond. Joan Kee, who teaches modern and contemporary art history at the University of Michigan, and also holds a law degree from Harvard, builds on tansaekhwa, or “Korean monochrome painting,” an abstract, minimalist style executed by means of nontraditional methods. Tansaekhwa flourished in the 1960s and 1970s but has endured as an iconic identifier and touchstone of all subsequent Korean contemporary art. Rich in analysis and description, Kee’s book traces the development of Korean painting and issues of national artistic identity as a reflection of the country’s economic growth and political turmoil over the past five decades. This pioneering, generously illustrated tome deserves a place in every serious collection of books about modern art in Asia. DC

MODERNA MUSEET AND KOENIG BOOKS

Tala Madani: Rip Image
EDITED BY ANDREAS NILSSON AND JULIA BJÖRNBERG

Tala Madani’s 2006 painting Rip Image adorns the catalog for her recent show at Malmö’s Moderna Museet and sets its tone—a burly but obscured man holds an image of himself torn in half. Inside, Madani’s explorations of doubleness, self-reflexivity and the inners and outards of flesh are dissected by some sharp minds. Five vantage points are proffered on Madani’s works of erosicism and repulsion: two essays, an artist interview and a short story extract by writer Nam Le that brings Madani’s clumsy male protagonist briefly to life. Occasionally the voices get lost in a soup of generalizations concerning the Arab world, global paternalism and American propaganda, but perhaps it’s not so sad to be talking in circles—for Madani, the spiral is a motif that highlights the passage but perhaps not the progress of time. CM

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of the article.