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The life aquatic

The best new art books



Corbusier Pool Building © Pixabay

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Published 18 October 2018 in [Books](#)

Hockney pictured his lovers immersed in it; Monet strained his eyes to capture it; and Turner made it modern. As illustrated in three new books, water can be a malleable muse.

High Dives and Deep Ends

Windows have been used as a framing device in art, from Hammershøi to Hopper; well, swimming pools do something similar. But as *The Swimming Pool in Photography* illustrates, these rectangles of recreation do much more than crop, edge and outline: they are scenes of glamor and drama; studies of architectural oddities; and exhibitions of beautiful (and otherwise) bodies.



Winner of Female Diving Contest Blandine Fagedet at the Swimming Pool Georges Vallerey in Paris, France, on 13 July 1962. Photo credit: Keystone-France/Gamma-Rapho via Getty images

This entertaining survey includes work from many of the great photographers, including René Burri, Martin Parr, Elliott Erwitt, Viviane Sassen and Jacques-Henri Lartigue. There are Hollywood pools, Corbusier pools, Mittel-European medicinal baths and cold-looking lidos. There are pools shaped like fish, guitars and cowboy boots.

In the 1920s and 1930s, swimming pools provided sport, health and well-being, as illustrated by shots of competition races, synchronized swimmers in musical showcases and high divers immortalized in backflips and somersaults.

A few decades on and pools had become accessories for the rich and famous: executives clink martinis and trade gossip in Slim Aarons high-color prints of Palm Springs pool parties; the Beverly Hills Hotel pool provides a hangover hangout for Faye Dunaway in Terry O'Neill's famous post-Oscars shot.

And then there's the water. "Even in the relative tameness of a pool, water is a gift to a photographer: it gives near-nudity, and it gives light, both at the same time," writes photography historian Francis Hodgson in his accompanying text. Dating from the late 19th-century—mustachioed men in full-body bathing suits—to the present day, this selection of some 150 images provides a chlorinated, shimmering social history.

**The Swimming Pool in Photography is published by Hatje Cantz*

The Beach Boys

Californian artists Richard Diebenkorn and Wayne Thiebaud were friends from the early 1960s until Diebenkorn's death in 1993. It was a meeting of inquisitive minds and inventive palettes. In *California Landscapes*, which has been published following the Acquavella Galleries exhibition of the same name, the pair deliver a cock-eyed and colorful take on their home turf and surf.



Wayne Thiebaud, *Brown River* (2002). Private Collection
 © Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA at ARS, New York

This beautifully produced volume—crisp reproductions, archival interviews and a sharp-eyed accompanying article by art historian John Yau—captures the pair’s engagement with their surroundings. Diebenkorn’s paintings date from the 1950s; Thiebaud’s run from the 1970s to recent work. Amorphous waterways thread through many of their compositions

Diebenkorn addressed Californian topography in an abstract fashion. Like the British painter and glider pilot Peter Lanyon, Diebenkorn found his stimulus from above. “I was struck by the aerial views when I was flying back to California from Albuquerque in 1951,” he recalled, “it was all like a flat design.” In one work, *Berkeley #44* (1955), Diebenkorn turns plots of land, lakes and a sliver of sea on the horizon into a jagged kaleidoscope of greens, yellows and blues.

Thiebaud conjures a more recognizable terrain, creating candy-colored patchworks of farmland, highways, flood plains, reservoirs and rivers. The Sacramento environs are seen through prisms of pastel hues and jarring perspectives. Much as Hockney has done more recently with the Yorkshire dales, Thiebaud dismantles scenery and unfurls it into rolling dreamlike vistas.

Thiebaud could equally well been talking about himself as of Diebenkorn when he said: “If you go down, see his studio, walk along the beach and see the ocean... he gets that into the work.”

**California Landscapes: Richard Diebenkorn/Wayne Thiebaud is published by Rizzoli/Acquavella*

Les Misérables en Mer

Many 20th century authors turned their hand to drawing or painting—William Wharton, Fred Uhlman, Henry Miller, William S Burroughs to name just a few. But it was the tortured 19th-century romantics who possessed raw talent.

In Sweden there was August Strindberg, who painted heavy impasto oils of rocky beaches, churning undercurrents and coastal clouds. While in France, in addition to being a poet, novelist, politician and polemicist, Victor Hugo proved to be a fine draughtsman. He produced some 4,000 drawings. Van Gogh and Delacroix were fans. And, like Strindberg, Hugo had an aquatic obsession.



Victor Hugo, *Ma destinée (My destiny)* (1867). Maisons de Victor Hugo, Paris/Guernesey © Maisons de Victor Hugo, Paris/Guernesey/Roger-Viollet

Stones to Stains, a new survey of Hugo's drawings, investigates the psychology behind his haunting images of crashing waves, sea monsters and ships in peril. He favored pen and wash on paper, using murky browns, even coffee, to accentuate the elemental feeling of these rough-hewn aspects.

"These shifting drawings," writes Florian Rodari in his introduction, are "increasingly agile, imaginative, steeped in a liquid element that drenches the entire landscape." Hugo worked on his gothic washes, he said, "to amuse me between verses". In his prose, the author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (Notre-Dame de Paris)* emphasized the light and dark of the human soul. His drawings treated roiling emotions metaphorically, translated into treatments of the weather and nature.

He inscribed one picture of a breaker with the words: "Ma destinée". His portentous vision was borne of personal tragedy. In 1843, Hugo's 19-year-old daughter Léopoldine drowned in the Seine. He was haunted by the loss for the rest of his life. In his poem *Dieu (God)*, the refrain is mordant and simple: "It is raining, raining, raining... the fierce drops persist." On his death in 1885, Victor was buried alongside Léopoldine.

**Stones to Stains: The Drawings of Victor Hugo is published by Prestel*