

## **Art Agency, Partners**

Art Agency, Partners is a bespoke art advisory firm founded in 2014, and built upon decades of combined experience, to provide counsel to many of the world's leading art collectors and institutions on collection assessment and development, estate planning, and innovative approaches to museum giving and growth.

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## **For All Your Holiday Gifting Needs**

### **The best art books to buy**



Rita Letendre at the opening of her exhibition at the Galerie Sherbrooke, 1969 (Gabor Szilasi)

with  Christian House

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Published 18 December 2019 in [Books](#)

A book is not just for Christmas. So, this selection aims to give your shelves a little long-term sustenance. I've wrapped up a world-renowned collection and vintage vernissages, the stylishly debonair and artistically debauched. But, since no one wants to look like a Grinch, so I've also included a volume with a dash of seasonal spirit.

## Bigger and better



Director Agnès Varda on the set of *Varda by Agnès* (2019), shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Courtesy Ciné Tamaris

When [MoMA](#) reopened in October it delivered a broader narrative. Mirroring the general cultural climate—more accommodating, less canonical—the rehang conjures up fresh associations, crisscrossing various decades. [MoMA Now: 375 Works From the Museum of Modern Art](#), the bulky new book of highlights from the museum's holdings, takes a similarly interdisciplinary approach but, thankfully, uses a straight line to join the dots.

The selection includes 170 works, including photographs, film and product design, absent from previous overviews. Entries are presented simply in chronological order, beginning with a silver print by [Julia Margaret Cameron](#) from 1867 and ending with the 2017 film *Faces Places*, a collaboration between director [Agnès Varda](#) and street artist [JR](#).

The design is unfussy, the text approachable. And the traditional approach reveals some surprising timings. We discover that [Odilon Redon](#) imagined a hot-air balloon styled as an eyeball before [Magritte](#) was even born. Perhaps more meaningfully, we also learn that the meaning of “modern” changes day by day.

[MoMA Now: 375 Works From the Museum of Modern Art](#) (Museum of Modern Art)

## Party pieces



Opening of the exhibition "10 Young Montreal Painters", Loyola Bonsecours Centre, 1967 (Gabor Szilasi)

"I'm very curious by nature-maybe too curious. Nosy even," admits Hungarian photographer [Gabor Szilasi](#) in his new, eponymously titled [monograph](#). Although best known for his street photographs of Quebec and Budapest, this volume collects Szilasi's shots of the Montreal art scene of the 1960s and 1970s. Here the artist sticks his nose into cafe

“happenings”, champagne toasts and impromptu gigs (Leonard Cohen turns up at one gallery with his harmonica).

The rather niche environment of opening nights might seem a cul-de-sac for a photographer, with their confined spaces and constrained behavior, but Szilasi delivers plenty of comedy, social history and compositional surprises. He snaps couples kissing under coat racks, posturing men and bored women, immense hairdos, impressive spectacles and tight turtlenecks. And everyone is smoking.

It is a fascinating insight into a particular time and place seen through an odd prism. “It was important to show the exhibition itself,” recalled Szilasi, “but it was the people who interested me the most.”

*Gabor Szilasi: The Art World in Montreal 1960-1980* (McGill-Queen’s University Press)

## Dive in



Rudolf Schlichter, *Damenkneipe (Women's Club)* (c. 1925). Credit: Private collection © Viola Roehr v. Alvensleben, Munich Photo: ag-

images

As well as being hothouses of bad behavior and eye-popping bar tabs, the cabarets and cafés of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were creative dives for many Modern masters. *Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art*—which accompanies a dazzling exhibition at the [Barbican Centre](#) in London (until 19 January)—covers some eight decades of work made for, and about, these rowdy haunts.

Some works were consciously created as art and some made for commercial purposes, but all are striking. There are paintings, photographs, posters, invitations, murals, tickets and menus in a survey that touches on a variety of talents, including [Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec](#), [Josef Hoffmann](#), [Ramón Alva de la Canal](#) and [Max Beckmann](#), among many others. It is a rare artistic milieu that touches on Habsburg glamour, flappers, shadow puppets, [Russian Futurism](#) and Nazi persecution.

The cabaret scene of 1920s Berlin is here, of course, with all its androgynous swagger and sickly colors ([Otto Dix's](#) watercolors capture the seamy side of the *strasse* in brute-camp style). But we also visit lesser-known hangouts, like the [Mbari Club](#) in Nigeria and [Rasht 29](#) in Tehran, both of which epitomized 1960s cool, continents away from the Manhattan buzz. This illuminating book takes the pulse of Saturday night and finds that decadence rarely goes out of fashion.

*Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art* (Prestel)

## Ticking off



The 1929 Cartier Éclipse, an 18 ct yellow gold and enamel shutter-form purse watch included in *The Watch: A Twentieth Century Style History*

Long before Apple turned wrists into “platforms”, they were pendulous shop windows for watchmakers. And, as Alex Barter notes in *The Watch: A Twentieth-Century Style History*, what you strap on it tells as much about your taste—and your times—as the pictures on your walls.

Barter, a former deputy worldwide head of Sotheby’s watch department, details how the world of chronometers engages with the metronome of artistic movements. The impact of the [Belle Epoque](#), [Art Nouveau](#), enameling practices and two world wars are all investigated along the way. As Barter observes: “The watch has always been a diverse creature, never immune to the influence of changing fashions.”

Additional material including, advertisements and logos highlight how these watches fitted into the design trends of their day. An ad for [Rolex Oyster](#) has all the machismo of a naval recruitment poster. In this elegant guide, which is crisply written, beautifully produced, finely photographed, Barter addresses the complicated nature of style: how it addresses notions of affluence, class, national pride, glamour and gender. You could say they are all timely issues.

*The Watch: A Twentieth Century Style History* (Prestel)

## Polarising opinion



A winter tourist and polar friend in early 20th century Germany, as featured in the Jochen Raiß book *Polar Bears*

German photo-editor and collector [Jochen Raiß](#) is obsessed with “the poetry of past moments”. Infatuated by found photographs uncovered in second-hand bookstores and flea markets, this Hamburg-based magpie has accumulated a hoard of some 3,000 anonymous prints of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. His new book picks out a thread from the collection with something of seasonal theme on which to end this column: [polar bears](#). Or, more accurately, 20th-century Germans posing with people dressed up as polar bears.

This craze, which ran from the 1920s to the 1960s, gripped Bavarian ski resorts, grand hotels, picnic parks and the races, all the playgrounds of German society. This is Instagram for the Weimar Republic.

There are bears on deckchairs, promenades and piers, at school outings and family gatherings. Raiß believes the whole ice-capade started as a gimmick at a seaside resort on the Baltic. And he dedicates the collection to all those anonymous models who got hot under the (fur) collar.

[Polar Bears](#) (Hatje Cantz)