

Briefly Noted

Stuart M. Blumin, with photographs by Hansi Durlach *The Short Season of Sharon Springs: Portrait of an American Village*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. 128 pp. \$19.95 (cloth).

This book represents a collaborative effort between a professional photographer and a historian to present "an account in words and pictures" of the growth, decline, and continued survival of a small health spa and village in upstate New York. The text is organized into three sections covering the history of the village and spa and one final section describing the community today. Historical photographs and some originals by Durlach are incorporated as illustrations loosely tied to the text. The written account is preceded by 16 full-page untitled photos by Durlach and followed by 30 more images grouped in a section entitled "Portrait of a Village." The text is strongest where it chronicles the evolution of this rural community but clearly falters in its description of contemporary life. Its lack of focus seems in no small part due to its professed intent to convey "the importance of the particular" while avoiding generalization. The greatest weakness lies in the photographic end of the account, however. The images are uneven and unexceptional and as a group provide no coherent view of the spa, the village, or the people. In addition there seems little coordination between photographs and text or photographer and historian. The student of visual communication or the sociological uses of photography will find this to be another example of the simple combination of separate efforts in different media with no guiding conception of the relative value of each record as a source of data.

Elizabeth Edwards and Lynne Williamson *World On A Glass Plate: Early Anthropological Photographs from the Pitt Rivers Museum*. Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum. 42 pp., 39 halftone illustrations. N.P.

World on a Glass Plate is a sampler from the glass plate collection owned by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. The photographs are early examples of images taken by travelers, professional photographers, anthropologists, and missionaries. Because we are sufficiently removed by time, the photographs provide

us with an opportunity to see the conventions of representation of the time and to ponder how we see the world through the eye of the photographer and how much the presentational styles of people in front of the camera have changed. The book teases the scholar of photography into wanting to further explore this vast collection.

Sally Henderson and Robert Landau *Billboard Art*. Introduction by David Hockney. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1981. 112 pp., 247 illustrations. \$9.95.

Much can be learned about the nature of industrial society from an examination of one of its peculiarly characteristic institutions: advertising. This book presents a lively and profusely illustrated history of visual advertising in public spaces, in particular of the billboard—the poster of the automobile age. The text and pictures trace advertising art from the nineteenth century on, concentrating on the large outdoor signs of the 1950s through the 1970s and making clear the enormous amount of interplay between "fine" and "commercial" art, in which each can be detected in the style and content of the other.

We are not surprised to find nineteenth century advertising posters in art galleries, but we are less ready to view the gigantic billboards along the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles as art. But that too will probably happen. As David Hockney says in his Introduction, "Sunset Boulevard is fun to drive through when you know the billboards change every month. It's sort of like a little gallery to drive down. The interesting ones are made to be seen at twenty miles per hour—you have to take them in at that speed."

Carol Beckwith and Tepilit Ole Saitoti *Maasai*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980. 276 pp.

This mammoth book (10½ × 13½ × 1½ inches) on the Maasai, nomadic herders of Kenya, East Africa, presents a still-appealing vision of the noble savage: a way of life—mobile and close to nature—conducted by a people whose motivations and activities are seemingly so unrelated to our civilization that it is difficult to realize they are our contemporaries. Sequentially organized according to the phases of the life cycle—youth, circumcision, warriors, and elders—with a descriptive narrative by an educated Maasai and handsomely pho-

tographed by an American artist, Carol Beckwith, this book can be viewed as a great leap forward in the evolution of the ethnographic picture book. Perhaps its apotheosis. The photographer followed the Maasai for almost 2 years and captured a remarkable range of scenes that vary in atmospheric tone, social tempo, physical action, and emotional effect. The key achievement, perhaps because of her long stay, is that the Maasai appear totally absorbed in their own experiences. This self-absorption and the physical beauty of this elegantly unclothed people induce in the viewer an intense sense of participation and lends an aura of naturalness to situations otherwise strange or even repugnant. The distinctive articulation of social roles for the male warrior and supportive woman played out in the pictures is all the more poignant because, recognizing the ongoing encroachment of farming and urban people, the Maasai author sees that his people must change. He closes the book with a plea to the national government and to the reader-at-large that the Maasai retain a fair share of their assets while making the transition to written deeds, immobility, and another kind of education.

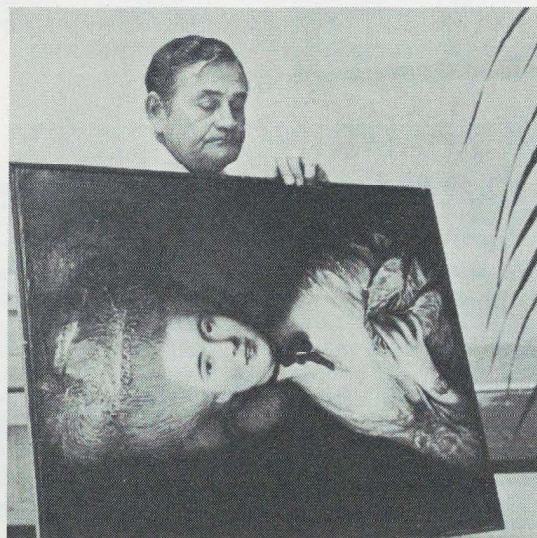
Eugene C. Burt An Annotated Bibliography of the Visual Arts of East Africa. Traditional Arts of Africa Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. \$20.00

The more than 2000 concisely annotated entries in this bibliography represent books, periodical articles, and archival documents relating to material culture in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and among the Ma-konde of Mozambique. A section on East Africa (General) precedes the four regional lists of entries. In this body of the bibliography each entry contains a full bibliographic citation and an indication of the degree to which the work cited addresses the topic of material culture. Three indexes are provided: a broad subject index of only 30 categories, an author index giving the names of every author connected with any cited work, and a culture index in which the author has striven to provide a standardized set of names for the various tribes, nations, or cultures in the region, with cross-references from variant spellings. The art of East Africa should be less neglected in studies of African art now that Burt's bibliography is available to researchers.

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