

## Very Fine Print

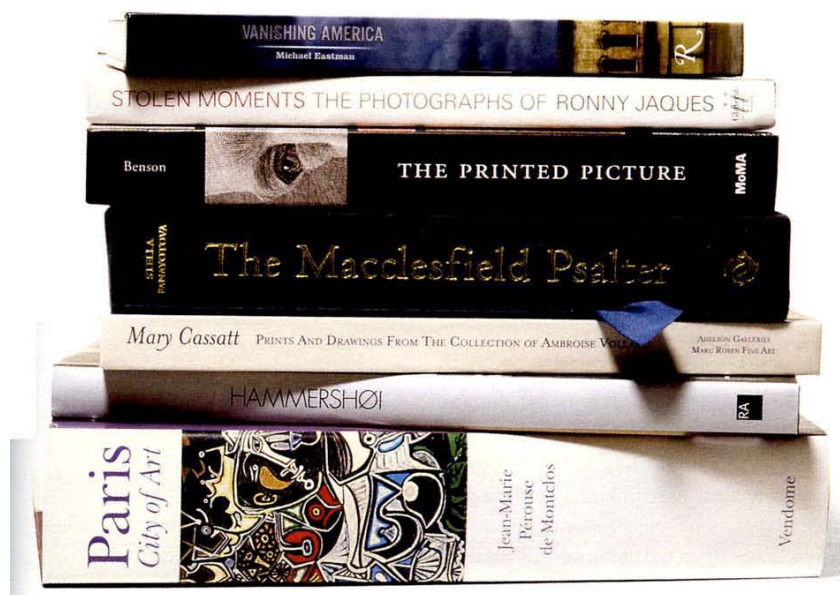
Setbacks in the publishing industry didn't hinder this year's yield of sensational art books.

By Katherine Jentleson Photographs by Dan Bibb

OVERALL, 2008 CAST AN OMINOUS SHADOW over the future of printed matter. Newspaper readership receded, magazines folded, and Amazon.com launched Kindle, a book-downloading device that can put more than 200 titles into the palm of its user's hand. In such an environment, it might seem counterintuitive that venerable art-book publishers actually increased their annual output of sumptuous volumes by more than a quarter this year. But perhaps it's the books' very luxuriousness—heavy stock, fine reproductions and large formats—that assures their survival. Just as the peacocks with the most extravagant plumes surpass their less-attractive counterparts, the art books of the highest quality thrived in 2008. A selection of the very fittest follows.

Among the most extravagant volumes of the year is the aptly titled **Le Corbusier, Le Grand** (Phaidon; \$175). This nearly two-foot-tall scrapbook provides a profusion of ephemera associated with the famously bow-tied, bespectacled architect—from his preparatory sketches for the metal and leather furniture that epitomized Bauhaus functionalism to snapshots of him posing with Josephine Baker. The gigantic tome begins with Le Corbusier's birth certificate of 1887 and ends with the last photo taken of him, as he waded in the Mediterranean, in whose waters bathers would find his body in the summer of 1965.

Le Corbusier's designs, such as the famous Villa La Roche, in the 16th arrondissement, also play a part in **Paris, City of Art** (Vendome; \$95). This lavishly illustrated guide to the cultural history of the City of Lights was originally released to rave reviews in 2003 and has been updated with new entries, such as those on the Musée du Quai Branly, the polarizing showcase of African and Oceanic art, and the Simone de Beauvoir footbridge that now cascades across the Seine. Its 850 color plates stir the Francophile





in all of us, bringing to mind Ernest Hemingway's famous quote about the Gallic capital: "Wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."

Helen Pierce Breaker was one of the photographers who captured Hemingway while he was living in Paris. Her 1928 photograph of the author is among the shots included in **Vanity Fair Portraits** (Harry N. Abrams; \$65), another supersize triumph of 2008. Seen through Breaker's lens, Hemingway appears as inscrutable as one of his protagonists, consuming the frame but disclosing very little. He shares a spread with the gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson—an example of the inspired juxtapositions that make the book an extraordinary tribute to a century of pioneering magazine photography rather than a merely fair vanity project. Some pairings are historical: The ideologically opposed Mexican muralists José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera face off once again in the book's pages. Others reveal the mag's progressive political bent—Nancy and Ronald Reagan share a spread with the Hoovers, while Bill Clinton gets placed next to FDR.

Although the volume contains many spectacular color photographs, the elegant work of Edward Steichen and his contemporaries make you rue the day that emulsion met chrome. If your inclination is toward the high drama of black-and-white portraiture, you might be interested in two other books: **Glamour of the Gods** (Steidl; \$65), a selection of 200 images from the film historian John Kobal's collection of studio photography in the golden age of cinema, and **Stolen Moments: The Photographs of Ronny Jaques** (Glitterati Incorporated; \$35), with an introductory essay by *Town & Country* editor in chief Pamela Fiori, which highlights one master of the medium whose work is absent from Kobal's trove of Harlows and Hepburns. A frequent contributor to *T&C* and *Harper's Bazaar*, Jaques shot without a crew, a practice whose lack of ego or pretense is mirrored in the ease of his subjects, John O'Hara and Marlon Brando among them.

Standing in stark contrast to flashbulbed celeb-



rity royalty are the sleepy interiors by the 19th-century Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi found in **Hammershøi** (The Royal Academy; \$75). Although a 1998 exhibition at the Guggenheim did much to bolster the painter's reputation Stateside, his haunting depictions of men and women quietly existing had not been surveyed in the U.K. in more than 20 years when the Royal Academy gave him a show last summer. This exhibition catalogue reproduces Hammershøi's paintings in an appropriately no-frills manner, typically displaying one dusky image per white page. The artist's ability to recast scenes of everyday life as haunting provinces of mystery speaks for itself.

Domestic themes continue in **Mary Cassatt: Prints and Drawings from the Collection of Ambroise Vollard** (Adelson Galleries and Marc Rosen Fine Art; \$50). The book focuses on the engravings, etchings and sketches by the celebrated Impressionist,

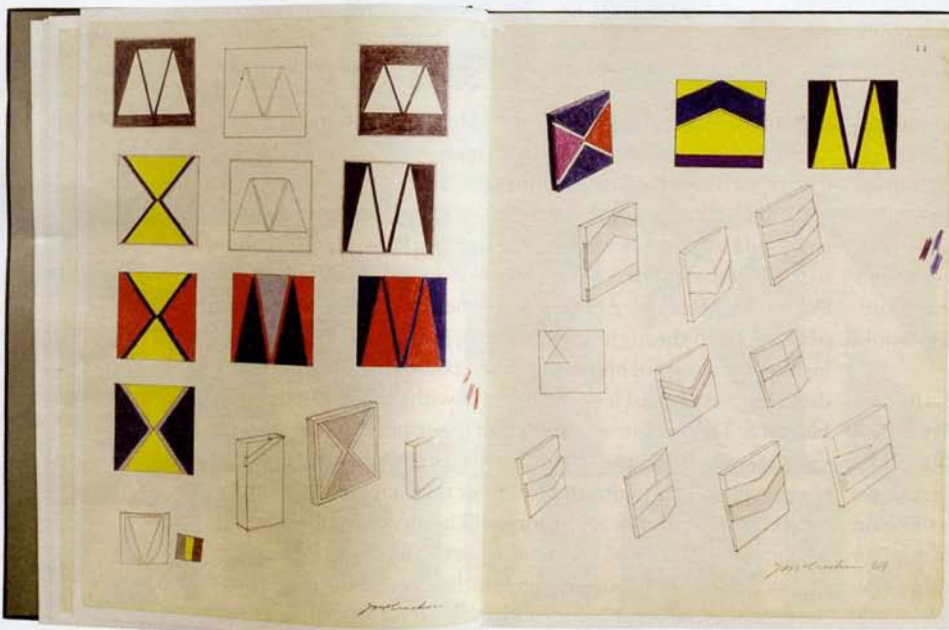
Those who appreciate the parchment of centuries past will also worship at the altar of the **Macclesfield Psalter** (Thames & Hudson; \$90), a 14th-century book of psalms that resurfaced in 2004. The buzz surrounding the manuscript crescendoed the following year when the Getty and Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum battled over it; the British institution ultimately triumphed, paying a cool £1.7 million (\$2.7 million). Thames & Hudson has reproduced the Psalter's pages in their original size, binding them with canvas and placing the whole inside a matching slipcase. The half-human monsters, sword-bearing sadists and Bacchic hooligans that grace the text's borders enliven the book's Latin verses, incarnating the medieval imagination in all its dark and twisted glory.

Another replica of a relic, this one from the modern era, made its way to the presses this year on the occasion of John McCracken's fall show of Conceptual sculpture at David Zwirner. **John McCracken Sketchbook** (Radius; \$75) is a reprint of the notebook of drawings that the artist kept in 1964. It includes Neville Wakefield's interview with McCracken, which the renowned curator opens by calling the sketchbook a Rosetta Stone, as the text unlocks the mind of a creator who otherwise leaves no trace of himself in his minimal, primary-colored sculptures.

The colors red, white and blue are the concern of three exceptional photography books whose stark imagery calls into question the fundamentals of the American dream, economic and otherwise. Michael Eastman's **Vanishing America** (Rizzoli; \$40) is a brilliant eulogy to the diners, doughnut shops and drive-ins of the mid-20th century, filled with nostalgia-inducing shots of decaying small towns. In **Meadowlands** (Powerhouse; \$50), the photographer Joshua Lutz exposes the urban sprawl that paved over the Main Streets of yore: backyards squeezed together like sardines, a deserted New Jersey Transit bus

stop flanked by a pitiful smattering of trees, and a cookie-cutter mansion with a bulldozer still in the driveway. Completing this haunting trilogy is **Beneath the Roses** (Harry N. Abrams; \$60), devoted to Gregory Crewdson's often unsettling but always beautiful C-prints. His shots of estranged homemakers and their lonely domains may hit on the worn-out theme of warped suburbia, but the astounding complexity of the baroque sets he constructs for each image makes his work unique.

There is also something to be said for a less belabored artistic approach, such as that favored by James Castle, the self-taught artist who is the focus of an exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art through January 4. The show's catalogue, **James Castle, A Retrospective** (Yale University Press; \$60), collects the output of the deaf Idaho native who, in the 1950s and '60s, used everything from cardboard boxes to his niece's homework in his drawings and assemblages. As we stand at the threshold of a new—and, we hope, better—year, the barns and silos that Castle meticulously depicted using soot as his medium are a warming reminder that a phoenix can rise from the ashes. ☐



In September, Radius Books released **John McCracken Sketchbook**, a reproduction of a notebook that the artist filled with preparatory sketches for his Conceptual sculpture, such as the ones shown above.

who favored printmaking from 1890 until her death in 1926. Vollard, a dealer more usually associated with Cassatt's male counterparts, was an ardent supporter of her prints and amassed more than 300 of them in his lifetime. The catalogue, which accompanied a show at New York's Adelson Galleries, breaks down the creative process of this queen of the quotidian, allowing the reader to follow several of her pictures as they evolve from primitive outlines to polychrome masterpieces.

The history of printing gets its due in **The Printed Picture** (MOMA; \$60), a catalogue for the exhibition of the same name which runs through June 2009 at MOMA. It is based on a lecture series that Richard Benson, the former dean of the Yale School of Art, has been delivering over the past decade about his personal hoard of images on paper. Benson's collection—a motley mix ranging from the 15th-century woodcut with which he begins his chronological survey to a machine-generated barcode—awakens a sense of wonder at picturemaking and its products. He fears that technology is expelling the human hand from a process that essentially began with hieroglyphs scratched onto a cave wall.