

Spring 2001

Ballast Quarterly Review, v16n3, Spring 2001

Roy R. Behrens
University of Northern Iowa, sassoonorlater@gmail.com

Let us know how access to this document benefits you

Copyright ©2001 Roy R. Behrens

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/ballast>



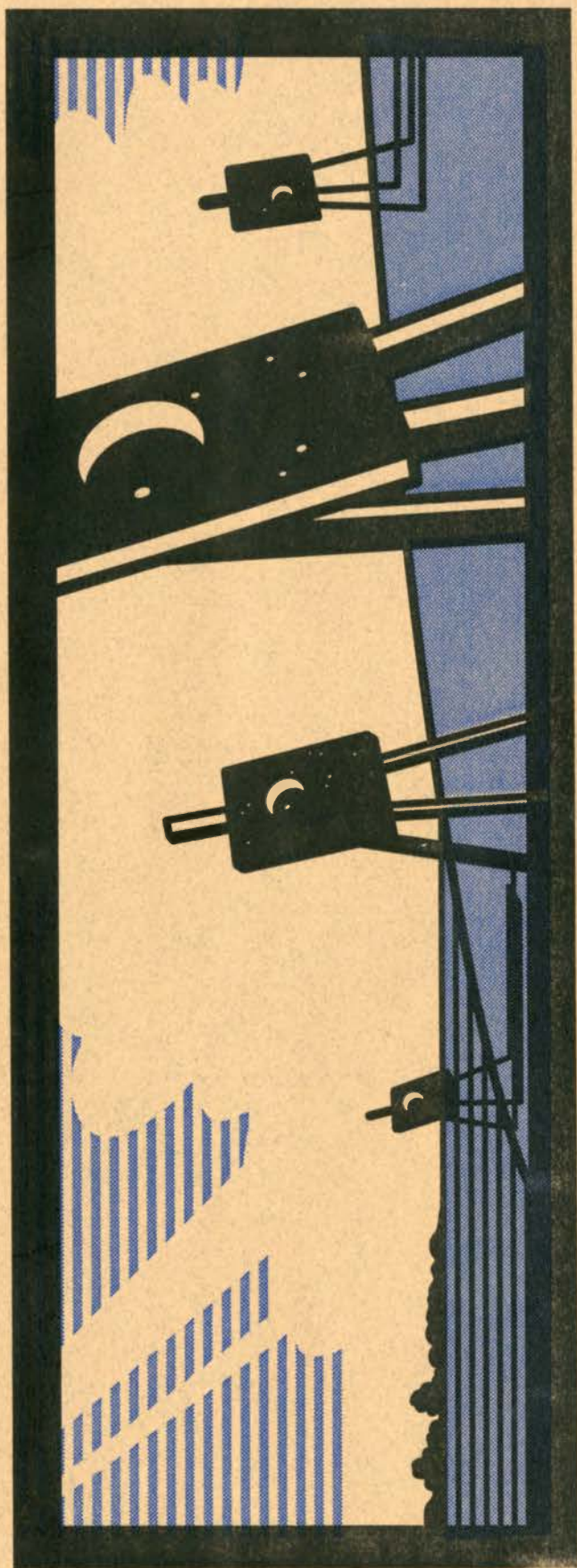
Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

Behrens, Roy R., "Ballast Quarterly Review, v16n3, Spring 2001" (2001). *Ballast Quarterly Review*. 62.
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/ballast/62>

This Periodical is brought to you for free and open access by UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ballast Quarterly Review by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.



Ballast Quarterly Review Volume 16 Number 3
Spring 2001. Copyright © 2001 by Roy R.
Behrens, editor, publisher and art director.
ISSN 1093-5789. E-mail <ballast@netins.net>.

SÖREN
KIERKEGAARD
(*The Sickness
Unto Death*)
The greatest
hazard of all,
losing one's self,
can occur very
quietly in the
world, as if it
were nothing at
all. No other loss
can occur so qui-
etly; any other
loss—an arm, a
leg, five dollars,
a wife, etc.—is
sure to be
noticed.



T. S. ELIOT
(*The Use of
Poetry and the
Use of Criticism*)
The chief use of
the "meaning"
of a poem, in
the ordinary
sense, may be to
satisfy one habit
of the reader, to
keep his mind
diverted and qui-
et, while the
poem does its
work upon him:
much as an
imaginary bur-
glar is always
provided with a
bit of nice meat
for the house-
dog.

Ballast is an acronym for Books Art Language
Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well
as a distant allusion to *Blast*, the short-lived
publication founded during World War I by
Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and
writer. *Ballast* is mainly a pastiche of astonish-
ing passages from books, magazines, diaries
and other writings. Put differently, it is a jour-
nal devoted to wit, the contents of which are
intended to be insightful, amusing or thought
provoking.

The purposes of *Ballast* are educational, apo-
litical and noncommercial. It does not carry
advertisements, nor is it supposed to be pur-
chased or sold. It is published approximately
every three months, beginning in the fall
(more or less) and ending in the summer.

To subscribe to *Ballast* or to order a gift sub-
scription, simply send in a mailing address and
five first class U.S. postage stamps for each
single issue desired. In other words, to
receive *Ballast* for one year (four issues), we
ask that each reader contribute a total of
twenty genuine unused postage stamps. Do
not send postage meter slips, nor do we
accept orders by phone or e-mail. When sub-
scribing, self-adhesive stamps are preferred.
Short of that, send good-looking, antique or
unusual stamps. In general we do not accept
requests from outside the U.S.

—

WALTER BENJAMIN
A highly embroiled quarter, a net-
work of streets that I had avoided for
years, was disentangled at a single
stroke when one day a person dear to
me moved there. It was as if a search-
light set up at this person's window
dissected the area with pencils of
light.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
(*Human, All Too Human*) Art makes
the sight of life bearable by laying
over it the veil of unclear thinking.

ON MERLE ARMITAGE: The Impresario of Book Design

Copyright © 2001 by Roy R. Behrens



LEFT
Title page of book
written and designed
by Merle Armitage,
1939

IN THE EARLY 1940s, shortly after the novelist Henry Miller had moved back to the U.S. from Paris, he concluded that a noncommercial artist in America "has as much chance for survival as a sewer rat."

Refusing to borrow or to hire out for "stultifying work," he sent out a letter inviting support from the readers of *The New Republic*, requesting, among other things, "old clothes, shirts, socks, etc. I am 5 feet 8 inches tall, weigh 150 pounds, 15 1/2 neck, 38 chest, 32 waist, hat and shoes both size 7 to 7 1/2. Love corduroys."

The appeal worked and a number of curious mailings arrived, one of which contained a complete tuxedo. "What'll I ever do with this?" Miller asked a friend, then used it to dress up a scarecrow that sat for a generation on the picket fence in front of his Partington Ridge house in Big Sur, California.

Among the other gifts was a cash contribution from Merle Armitage, an Iowa-born book designer, civil engineer, set designer, concert promoter, gourmet, art collector, and author. Armitage was also living in California, and soon after, when he visited Miller's home for the first time, he described his profession as that of an "impresario."

MERLE
ARMITAGE
Through the
medium of the
book, the musi-
cian, architect,
painter, engi-
neer, industrial-
ist, scientist and
writer may
become perma-
nently articulate.
Here they meet
on common
ground.



WALTER
HAMADY
The book is the
Trojan horse of
art.

CLIFTON FADIMAN

The adjective
is the banana
peel of the parts
of speech.



ABOVE
Title spread for
George Gershwin (NY:
Longmans, Green and
Company, 1938),
designed by Merle
Armitage

MARK TWAINE

Agassiz does rec-
ommend authors
to eat fish,
because the
phosphorus in it
makes brains.
But I cannot help
you to a decision
about the
amount you
need to eat. Per-
haps a couple of
whales would be
enough.

"But I have heard that you were a
writer?" replied Miller.

"If the truth were known," Armitage
explained, "I write books so that I will be
able to design them." In fact, Armitage had
designed nearly two dozen books by that
time, many of which he had also written.

But Miller was incredulous: "Does a
book have to be designed?" he asked. "A
book is a book, and I don't see how you
can do much about it."

BORN IN 1893 on a farm outside of
Mason City, Iowa, Merle Armitage's inclina-

tion toward design,
engineering and prob-
lem-solving can be
traced back to his
childhood. His paternal
grandfather had been a
friend of J.I. Case, an
important pioneer in
the development of
steam driven farm

machinery; while a few miles east of the
Armitage home was Charles City, site of
the invention of the first gasoline powered
farm tractor.

One day as the young Armitage and his
father were helping a neighboring farmer
named Wright with the repair of a wind-
mill, a messenger rode up on horseback
and handed the man a telegram. "He passed
it around," Armitage remembered, "and my
father read it aloud. It said: 'We flew today
at Kitty Hawk,' and it was signed Orville
and Wilbur." Armitage was just as
impressed by the immediacy of the
telegram as by its message: "The two were
equally exciting to me: to fly through the
air, to send a message over the wire. Both
left me absolutely enslaved to things
mechanical."

His father, according to Armitage, was a
dreamer who should never have become a
businessman. Nevertheless, "he had great
vision," and, at a time when steers ranged
free to graze, he made a fortune (which he
later lost in a market crash) on the innova-
tion of corn-fed beef: "Finding that corn
grew luxuriantly in the new land," recalled
Armitage, his father "conceived the idea
that purchasing range cattle and feeding
them all the corn they could eat for two
months would produce new flavor."

It was by his father's influence that he

became intensely interested in farm implements, steam locomotives and automobiles, and in engineering and inventing. At the same time, it was his mother (a school teacher) who encouraged his artistic abilities by the choice of the pictures she hung in their home, by the brazen act of painting the front door a bright Chinese red (thus creating "a neighborhood sensation"), and by reinforcing his early attempts at drawing.

His mother's parents, the Jacobs, lived in Mason City, which Armitage described as "a sweet Iowa town of tree-shaded streets and friendly people," the town that was later immortalized as River City in *The Music Man* by Meredith Willson. (It was also for a while the home of Bil Baird, the puppeteer.) Today, across the street from Willson's birthplace is the Charles H. MacNider Museum, a majestic English Tudor Revival home that bears the name of an Armitage family friend, who was also the owner of the First National Bank.

When Armitage was still a teenager, it was a rivalry between MacNider and another Mason City banker that resulted in the hiring of a young Chicago-based architect named Frank Lloyd Wright (no relation to the Wright brothers, apparently) to design a new bank, offices and an adjoining hotel for the City National Bank (which remains and may soon be completely restored). Within the next decade, Wright (until he was discredited by eloping with a client's wife), Walter Burley Griffin, William Drummond, and other gifted young architects designed innovative Prairie Style houses within a planned community, so that Armitage's little hometown is now widely known as the site of a marvelous cluster of gem-like early modern homes.

The ancestors of both Wright and Armitage had settled in Wisconsin, from which the latter had then moved to northern Iowa. Wright was commissioned to design the City National Bank in 1908 through the efforts of J.E. Markeley, a friend and Mason City businessman whose two daughters were students of Wright's aunt at her Hillside School, in Spring Green, Wisconsin, which was housed in buildings that Wright had designed. By the time the Mason City hotel project began, Armitage was 15 years old, and he and his family had already moved to a cattle ranch

GEORG
CHRISTOPH
LICHTEN-
BERG

A book is a mirror; if a monkey peers into it, then it will not be an apostle that looks out.



RUDYARD
KIPLING

"I always tell my people there's a limit to the size of the lettering," he said. "Overdo that and the ret'na doesn't take it in. Advertisin' is the most delicate of all the sciences."

JAMES
DICKEY

If it were thought that anything I wrote was influenced by Robert Frost, I would take that particular work of mine, shred it, and flush it down the toilet, hoping not to clog the pipes.

**MERLE
ARMITAGE**
To attempt to make art understandable and appealing to the people is to take from it the very elements that make art. Bring a thing down to the level of popular understanding, and you bring it down below the timberline of esthetic worth.



ABOVE
Title spread for
George Gershwin (NY:
Longmans, Green and
Company, 1938),
designed by Merle
Armitage

➔

**ROBERT
ESCARPIT**
...a book is not a
thing like other
things. When we
hold it in our
hands, all we
hold is paper:
the book is else-
where.

near Lawrence, Kansas, and then to Texas.

In one of his two autobiographies, Armitage refers to the architect's son, Frank Lloyd Wright Jr. (known as Lloyd), as "an old friend." In 1923, when the American press reported, incorrectly, that Wright's Imperial Hotel in Tokyo had been devastated by an earthquake, Armitage (in his capacity as a publicist) was recruited by the architect to help to set the record straight. They remained what Armitage described as "casual friends" for many years, dining together for the last time in New York in 1953. Wright died in 1959.

ART, DESIGN, ADVERTISING, and mechanical engineering: In Armitage's young imagination, these allied yet differing interests combined in the form of a breathtaking automobile, the Packard.

It was his childhood fascination with this motor vehicle, he recalled in 1945, "[which satisfied] esthetic as well as utilitarian demands," that led him to start a collection

of Packard advertising material, publications that, like the machine they advertised, "reflected advanced design and a kind of artistic integrity. Brochures of other makes of that time usually contained retouched

half-tone illustrations, hard and unlovely as those in heavy-hardware catalogs. Packard used distinguished line drawings, excellent typography, and hand lettering which would be acceptable today."

He was also influenced by the "sleek and smart" styling of the passenger trains on the Santa Fe Railway (known then as the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient Railroad Company), which he noticed as early as 1902, when he and father drove to Lawrence. "The literature and advertising of the Santa Fe," he remembered, "even its world-renowned symbol (of Aztec origin) suggest discernment, and a sophistication seldom associated with a railroad." Having never attended college, it was the corporate image and advertising publications of Packard and the Santa Fe Railway, said Armitage, "together with the scant treasures of our library, [that] were in a very

personal sense my substitutes for college and university...my first contacts with esthetic appreciation and the cosmopolitan amenities of life."

Given Armitage's childhood influences, it is fitting that his first two jobs (beginning at age 17) were as a civil engineer in Texas, apparently connected with the Santa Fe Railway, and then as a graphic designer in the advertising department of the Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit. He remained in these positions for less than a year, and soon after decided that he should become a theatre set designer, a move that eventually led to a lucrative 30-year career as a concert impresario.

Armitage is mostly remembered today as an extraordinary book designer, who was also the art director of *Look* magazine (1949-1954), an art collector (Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya, Gauguin, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Marin, Klee, and Kandinsky), and a past president of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (1950-1951). But during the first 50 years of his life (as he explained to Henry Miller), he earned an ample income as the promoter and manager of dancers, opera singers, and opera and ballet companies. Among his illustrious clients were Anna Pavlova, Yvette Guilbert, Feodor Chaliapin, Amelita Galli-Curci, Mary Garden, Rosa Ponselle, and the Diaghilev Ballet.

He was also the cofounder and general manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Association, a board member of the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra, and manager of the Philharmonic Auditorium of Los Angeles. He knew and authored books about some of the finest artists of the century, among them Igor Stravinsky, Martha Graham, George Gershwin, Pablo Picasso, Rockwell Kent, and Edward Weston.

Armitage's success as an impresario, as noted by Jay Satterfield, was due in part to his willingness to promote "highbrow" performances by using "lowbrow" advertising ploys, including false scandals and sexual suggestion. At the time, announcements of concerts were usually made quietly through restrained, tasteful notices, in contrast to slapstick, flamboyant affairs like the circus. Armitage's innovation was to stake out a middle ground: By promoting cultural events in much the same way that automobiles and railways were advertised, he

AN ARMITAGE CHRONOLOGY

1893

Merle Armitage born
13 February near
Mason City, Iowa.

1910

Employed as an engineer for the Santa Fe Railway, then as advertising designer for the Packard Motor Car Company.

1913

After working briefly as a stage designer, becomes a theatre promoter or impresario.

1924

Co-founder and general manager of the Los Angeles Grand Opera Association.

1929

Designs his first book, *The Aristocracy of Art*.

1933

Appointed regional director of the Public Works Art Projects in Southern California; hires Edward Weston, among others.

1949

Art director of *Look* magazine.

1950-51

President of the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

1954

Retires to Manzanita Ranch in Yucca Valley CA.

1975

Dies on 15 March.

JAY SATTERFIELD

Viewed from one perspective, Armitage was a man of refined taste who championed a modern esthetic...He devoted much of his life to what we think of as the high arts, from the visual to the theatrical. But at the same time, Armitage was always an advertising man whose favorite marketing ploy was sex. He was highbrow and lowbrow while selling "culture" to a middlebrow audience.



MERLE ARMITAGE

Art is an aristocratic goddess who can be wooed and won by anyone, so long as that anyone has a certain open mindedness, a certain flair, a certain spirit somewhat akin to rapturous impulsiveness, a certain capacity of ecstasy, a certain contempt for the cheap and tawdry, a certain understanding of sensuality, a certain pagan love of beauty for itself alone.

believed that a much wider audience might "be led to realize that the arts, and their enjoyment, were reasonably normal activities...needing to be classified neither with afternoon tea nor epileptic fits."

As time went on, he explained, "I became more and more convinced that posters, advertisements in newspapers and magazines, as well as thousands of announcements and circulars used by a concert manager, must reflect the quality of the performer not only in the text, but more important, in the design. Soon I found myself laying out every piece of printing concerned with my concerts, opera or ballet seasons."

It was this same philosophy that prompted him to become a book designer, resulting from his decision to use phenomenal books to promote artists whom he admired; not just concert performers, but visual artists, composers and writers as well. Determined "to work only with publishers who would give me a free hand in design," he not only often wrote or edited his own books, in many cases he was also the publisher.

Of the more than two dozen volumes that Armitage both authored and designed are *Rockwell Kent* (Knopf, 1932), *So-Called Modern Art* (Weyhe, 1939), *United States Navy* (Longmans, 1940), *Notes on Modern Printing* (Rudge, 1945), *Rendezvous with the Book* (McKibbin, 1949), *Railroads of America* (Little Brown 1952), *George Gershwin: Man and Legend* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958), and his autobiographies, *Accent on America* (Weyhe, 1939) and *Accent on Life* (Iowa State University Press, 1965). In addition, he designed more than 40 other books which he either edited or wrote essays for, and over 60 others by other authors. In the books of his own writings (his autobiographies, for example, or those in which he talks about the design of books), portions of the narrative are often recycled, if somewhat revised and reshuffled, so that their enduring significance is more as adventures in daring design than as freshly written texts.

WHEN ARMITAGE WAS four years old, Frank Lloyd Wright had collaborated with one of his clients on an "artist's book" about esthetics, the soul and domestic architecture, titled *The House Beautiful*

(Auvergne Press, 1897). The text was derived from a popular talk by a nationally-known Unitarian minister, William C. Gannett. Wright designed the book, while his client, William H. Winslow, set the type and hand printed an edition of 90 copies in the basement of his new home, only 20 of which now survive.

Thirty-five years later, Wright wrote and designed a second extraordinary volume, titled *An Autobiography*. The first edition was published in 1932 by Longmans, Green and Company, based in London and New York; the second, which came out in 1943, by Duell, Sloan and Pearce in New York. Both editions are much sought after by admirers of book design, largely because of the boldness with which Wright treats the section openings as continuous spreads, not just single facing fields that happen to be juxtaposed. Perhaps the most stirring example is the magnificent title spread for "Book Two—Work." Wright approached book designing with the same "organic form" philosophy that governed his architecture, with the result, as a critic declared at the time, that the design of his autobiography "compares in brilliance and originality with his buildings."

As Richard Hendel pointed out in *On Book Design*, "Designers are to books what architects are to buildings." Merle Armitage designed his first book in 1929, and in subsequent years, he designed at least 9 books for Longmans, and 13 for Duell, Sloan and Pearce (including several of his best known titles), the publishers who were responsible for Wright's autobiography. In light of their contacts, one wonders to what degree Armitage, the *enfant terrible* of book design, was inspired by the work of Wright, the bad boy of architecture, and vice versa. While Armitage admired Wright's architecture, he also liked to make it known that "on the prairies, and long before Frank Lloyd Wright became an influence, the Santa Fe [Railway] had constructed its stations on a horizontal motif."

One wonders too to what extent Wright and Armitage were influenced by W.A. Dwiggins' *Layout in Advertising* (1928) or that designer's celebrated interpretations of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* (Knopf, 1929) and H.G. Wells' *The Time*

ISSAC
D'ISRAELI
(*Curiosities of Literature*) The Romans burnt the books of the Jews, of the Christians and of the Philosophers; the Jews burnt the books of the Christians and the Pagans; and the Christians burnt the books of the Pagans and the Jews.



ABOVE
Photograph of
Merle Armitage,
c. 1930.
Photographer
unknown. Private
collection.

WALTER
RALEIGH
An anthology is
like all the
plums and
orange peel
picked out of a
cake.



FRAN
LEBOWITZ
Never judge a cover
by its book.

FOOTNOTES:

Among the sources for this essay were the "Merle Armitage" article in *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (NY: James T. White & Co., 1952); the Armitage entry by Richard Hendel in J.A. Garraty and M.C. Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jay Satterfield, "Merle Armitage: Accent on Taste" in *Books at Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa), April 1996; Robert M. Purcell, *Merle Armitage Was Here! A Retrospective of a Twentieth Century Renaissance Man* (Morongo Valley CA: Sagebrush Press, 1981); and various writings by Armitage, particularly *Notes on Modern Printing* (NY: Rudge, 1945), and his autobiographies, *Accent on America* (NY: Weyhe, 1939) and *Accent on Life* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1965). Thanks also to Ginger (Woods) White, whose father worked with Armitage in the 1930s; and to Richard Leet, Director of the Charles H. MacNider Museum in Mason City, Iowa. This essay will also be published in June 2001 in Steven Heller and Georgette Balance, eds., *Graphic Design History* (NY: Allworth Press).

Machine (Random House, 1931). Anyone who cared about book design in those days, wrote Armitage, "was aware of the Nonesuch and the Golden Cockerel Presses and the work of Eric Gill, Francis Meynell, Stanley Morison, and others in England." He himself collected the books of Bruce Rogers ("perhaps the greatest designer of them all") and "had long admired the distinguished work of such Americans as W.A. Dwiggins, with its Oriental influence."

In Dwiggins' layout for *The Power of Print—and Men* (Mergenthaler, 1936), there is a geometric sweep and some use of the tactics that Armitage called "my inventions" that "stirred violent criticism" and caused him, in certain circles, to be reviled as "the destroyer of book tradition, the bad boy of typography, the usurper of the placid pools of bookmaking": "i.e., use of the endsheets, double-page title pages, large readable type, generous margins, etc." Other notable aspects of Armitage's books, as Hendel has said, are "his 'cinematic' treatment of the opening pages" and his "exuberant typography."

Armitage was just as direct and outspoken as Wright, and if he was despised or avoided (George Macy called him "that bull-in-our-china-shop"), it surely was partly because of the tone with which he communicated. He was, as described by a close friend, Robert M. Purcell, "a mercurial man in the truest sense. He was like quicksilver, and no thumb could hold him down. He was quick to joy, quick to anger, quick to create. He, like most of us, liked appreciation of what he did, and was quick to take umbrage if he was crossed, although he was a good resounding arguer and would take his lumps if he lost a point, or bellow with laughter when he won."

In photographs, Armitage is a big man with a huge head and broad smile, who often wore a cowboy hat and string tie, a person who would not be popular now in an age of political correctness and disingenuous double-talk. According to Purcell, "He had a mammoth lust for food, and the build to prove it; he liked hearty food, no nin-compoop lemon jello salad with shreds of lettuce for him. He lusted after art, art that dominated and spoke out, no pastels and chalk for him. A lust for good music, not a

tinkling piano and chaminade, but Wagner, Brahms, Beethoven, Bach, and among the neo-moderns, Satie, Ravel, and Stravinsky. A lust for good conversation, and in no way detouring away from a hearty argument with rolling thunderous opinions."

He must have been literally lustful as well. He used up four marriages, the last one ending sadly in an annulment, after no more than two months. A few years later, when Armitage was close to 80 years old and living alone on his Manzanita Ranch near Yucca Valley, Calif., his friend Purcell "happened to comment on having seen him with a very nice looking widow of about forty, four decades his junior. He said, 'Oh, yes. She comes out to the ranch and services me.' I had never heard that term in that context. It came probably from his Iowa farm youth where his father 'covered' cows in order to breed tremendous herds and become one of the first major 'feeders' in Iowa, where feeding now is a bigger business than breeding."

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT was short and slim. It must have been more than amusing to see the large figure of Armitage, looking even larger by comparison, at the feet of the elephantine ego that lived in the under-sized corpus of Wright, the self-described "world's greatest architect." At their last luncheon together, Wright complained to Armitage that some people believed that his school at Taliesin West produced only "little Frank Lloyd Wrights." "But just remember this, young man," he said to Armitage, "there are no *little* Frank Lloyd Wrights."

Nor was there anything puny about Merle Armitage. His was a bolsterous ego that lived in a spacious body, a bombastic tree of a figure that fell from a fatal stroke on March 15, 1975. Years earlier, the always impish Wright poked fun at the expansiveness of Armitage, both physical and social, when he gave him a signed photographic portrait by Yosef Karsh: It is inscribed "To Merle, the Armitage" and dated February 30—a day of course that doesn't exist. ↗

HAMMOND INNESS

Books are just trees with squiggles on them.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

An old poet comes at last to watch his moods as narrowly as a cat does a mouse.



ABOVE
Logo designed by
KAREN STRAUB

WALTER HAMADY

A dented deckle. A fold-over corner. The out-of-square sides. That fortuitous red thread underlining a random word, that lace-wing insect preserved forever in the corner of the title page, that crater, the vatman's drops, the vatman's tears, a circle between title and text. The irregularity signifies: here, *humanity*, here is a sign that a human being did this! The eye and hand were here! The aesthetic Killroy, if you will.

RIGHT
Page from *Camou-
flaged Simplified* by
ERIC SLOANE
(1942).



GUSTAVE
FLAUBERT
(*Madame
Bovary*)

Human speech is
like a cracked
kettle on which
we tap out tunes
that can make
bears dance,
when we would
move the stars.



PABLO
PICASSO
[Punctuation
marks are] The
fig-leaves that
hide the private
parts of litera-
ture.

RECOMMENDED Eric Sloane, *Camouflage Simplified* (Reprint of the 1942 Devin-Adair edition; available at <www.eric-sloane-awareness.com>). A widely-known popular artist, author and historian, Eric Sloane (1905-1985) was famous for his books of pen-and-ink illustrations of Americana, especially Colonial-period tools, barns and covered bridges. He may also have been the first television weatherman. Combining his interests in weather and art, he made drawings and paintings of clouds (called "cloudscapes") while flying with Wiley Post, the flamboyant one-eyed pilot who later perished in a crash with Will Rogers. During World War II, Sloane's knowledge of aerial observation undoubtedly contributed to his decision to both write and illustrate this brief but amazingly thorough account of the theory and practice of camouflage. In 62 lively pages, he uses his characteristic hand lettering and crisp, clear diagrams and charts to summarize all the traditional ways (figure-ground blending, shadow elimination, disruptive patterning, and mimicry) of concealing or disrupting shapes in nature, and in land, air and sea warfare, and disguising industrial sites from the air. The original book is extremely rare, and this is simply a spiral-bound copy of that.

EUDORA WELTY (*The Writer's Chapbook*) A lady had decided she'd write a novel and got along fine till she came to the love scene. "So," she told my friend, "I thought, there's William Faulkner, sitting right up there in Oxford. Why not send it to William Faulkner and ask him?" So she sent it to him, and time went by, and she didn't hear from him, and so she called him up. Because there he was. She said, "Mr. Faulkner, did you ever get that love scene I sent you?" He said yes, he had got it. And she said, "Well, what do you think of it?" And he said, "Well, honey, it's not the way I'd do it—but you go *right ahead*." Now, wasn't that gentle of him?

JAN STRUTHER

Giving a party is very like having a baby: its conception is more fun than its completion, and once you have begun it it is almost impossible to stop.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Sabine Thiel-Silling, ed., *Icons of Architecture: The 20th Century* (NY: Prestel, 1998). ISBN 3-7913-1949-3. Peter Stepan, ed., *Icons of Photography: The 20th Century* (Prestel, 1999). ISBN 3-7913-2001-7. Volker Albus, et al., eds., *Icons of Design: The 20th Century* (Prestel, 2000). ISBN 3-7913-2306-7. These are three titles in an on-going series of volumes about pivotal, classic achievements in art, architecture and design within the past century. Consistent in size, length and illustrative richness, each volume has been edited by one or more experts on the subject, with written contributions by a team of distinguished scholars. The term that most aptly describes them may be "pictorial chronologies," in the sense that each consists of a time-ordered sequence of two-page spreads, which feature reproductions of about 100 groundbreaking objects (buildings, photographs, industrial products), along with brief critical essays and a timeline of the life and work of the originator of each, among them such familiar names as Marianne Brandt, Raymond Loewy, André Kertész, Berenice Abbott, Kenzo Tange, and Adolf Loos. Illustrated by hundreds of photographs, drawings and portrait photographs, these are rich and accessible volumes that have both the breadth and the detail of an encyclopedic bird's-eye-view of Modernism.

PETER DE VRIES

You can't be happy with a woman who pronounces both d's in Wednesday.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED John Sloan, *John Sloan on Drawing and Painting: Gist of Art* (Mineola NY: Dover Publications, 2000). ISBN 0-486-40947-3. To understand this volume, a reprint of a famous book titled *Gist of Art* (first published in 1939), it is helpful to realize the prominence of John Sloan (1871-1951), an American painter, printmaker and teacher. Trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, he was a close associate of Robert Henri (who authored an earlier, popular book on *The Art Spirit*, 1923) and other members of a group of painters called The Eight. Also known as the Ashcan School, these artists believed that an artist should show not just the affable aspects of life but the putrid and seamier portions as well. An influential teacher at the Art Students League in New York from 1916 to about 1938, among his well-known students were Aaron Bohrod, Reginald Marsh, Eric Sloane (who changed his name to Sloane, with an e on the end, in honor of his teacher), Alexander Calder, Kimon Nicolaides, Adolf Gottlieb, John Graham, and Barnett Newman. This new edition of the notes and observations distilled from his long years of teaching is supplemented by a detailed chronology of his life, 46 illustrations, and an introduction by Helen Farr Sloan, a student whom Sloan later married.

EVELYN WAUGH

(*Brideshead Revisited*)

Conversation should be like juggling; up go the balls and the plates, up and over, in and out, good solid objects that glitter in the footlights and fall with a bang if you miss them.



AMBROSE BIERCE

(*The Devil's Dictionary*)

DIE, N. The singular of "dice." We seldom hear the word, because there is a prohibitory proverb, "Never say die."

STENDHAL

Glances are the heavy artillery of the flirt: everything can be conveyed in a look, yet that look can always be denied, for it cannot be quoted word for word.



E. M. CIORAN

The unusual is not a criterion. Paganini is more surprising and more unpredictable than Bach.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Kate C. Duncan, *1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). ISBN 0-295-98010-9. This is a fascinating account of a celebrated tourists' haunt, called Ye Olde Curiosity Shop, on the waterfront in Seattle. Founded in 1899 by Ohio-born curio collector Joseph E. "Daddy" Standley, it was a shop where one could buy genuine Native American handicrafts (carvings, baskets, blankets, moccasins, masks, totem poles), while also being entertained by various "cabinets of curiosities" which featured bogus shrunken heads, phony mermaids, costumed fleas, armadillo sewing baskets, and other dubitable exotica. Robert L. Ripley, author of *Ripley's Believe It or Not!*, was a frequent visitor, and often purchased items for his cartoons and lectures. Of the book's historic photographs, one of the most interesting is a page spread from Standley's guest book (p. 24), in which news clippings, postcards, and other collage materials are spontaneously combined with diary entries, anecdotes, and signatures of famous guests, among them Charlie Chaplin, Theodore Roosevelt, Will Rogers, and Katherine Hepburn. For more than a century, the shop (which still exists, at a new location on Pier 54 in Seattle) has functioned as a retail store, a museum of exotica, and a crossroads for people with interests in unusual phenomena, including B.J. Palmer (founder of the Palmer Chiropractic College, who designed a grotto in Davenport, Iowa, called A Little Bit O' Heaven), and Father Paul Dobberstein (creator of the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, Iowa), both of whom used shells and other objects supplied by Ye Olde Curiosity Shop in constructing unusual settings in which to meditate.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Steven Heller and Mirko Illic, *Genius Moves: 100 Icons of Graphic Design* (Cincinnati OH: North Light Books, 2001). ISBN 0-89134-937-5. For almost a decade, *New York Times* art director Steven Heller has contributed a column to *PRINT* magazine called "Separated at Birth," in which he features twin-like pairs of otherwise unrelated designs. In 1993, he and Julie Lasky wrote an entire book on "appropriation" in design, titled *Borrowed Design: Use and Abuse of Historical Form* (Van Nostrand Reinhold). This book is in part an extension of that, in the sense that it unearths and juxtaposes examples of graphic design that seem to be indebted to earlier efforts in art and design. It is shown convincingly, for example, that the abstract crosses in the work of the Russian Constructivists were probably inspired by the clerical garb of Russian Orthodox priests in the 15th century; or that the famous pointing hand in James Montgomery Flagg's "I Want You For the U.S. Army" poster (1917) was anticipated by a ubiquitous advertising display for a drink called Moxie (1911) and a World War I recruiting poster (1914) in which Lord Kitchener (in a pose identical to that of Uncle Sam) "points a finger" at unenlisted British males. For good or bad, this book has very little text: Other than a brief paragraph that introduces each icon, its only commentary is a well-written opening essay. But it offers an almost unparalleled wealth of more than 500 full-color illustrations of historic examples of graphic design.

All subscriptions to *Ballast* (including gift subscriptions) must be mailed to the following address:

Ballast Quarterly Review
Attn: Subscription Oaf
2022 X Avenue
Dysart, Iowa 52224-9767

Ballast is published in a limited edition and back issues are not generally available. However, any issue may be xeroxed to provide copies to others, but the copies must never be altered or sold. Rarely do we use unsolicited submissions, but readers are always encouraged to send offbeat material, verbal or visual, of the sort that the journal might publish. Original material must be explicitly labeled as such. Material that is not original must clearly make note of its author and source. All submissions are unpaid, and unsolicited material will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Ballast does not have a budget as such. For nearly 16 years, it has operated at a loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the paycheck of the Subscription Oaf. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

Ballast has a collaborative affiliation with *Leonardo: Journal of the International Society of Arts, Sciences, and Technology* (MIT Press). As a result, some of the book reviews in *Ballast* are reprinted either on the *Leonardo* web site at <http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/leonardo/reviews/reviewlist.html> or in the printed magazine.

JULES FEIFFER

I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn't poor, I was needy. They told me it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy, I was deprived. Then they told me underprivileged was over-used, I was disadvantaged. I still don't have a dime. But I have a great vocabulary.

COVER by JAY BROWN (2000). Also see his website at designleaf.com.

MILTON GLASER (*Art Is Work*)

There is no instrument more direct than a pencil and a piece of paper for the expression of ideas. Everything else that interferes with that direct relationship with the eyes, the mind, the arm, and the hand causes a loss of fidelity, if I can use that word this way. I like the idea that this ultimate reductive simplicity is the way to elicit the most extraordinary functions of the brain.



MARIANNE MOORE

Subjects choose me... I lie in wait like a leopard on a branch-stained metaphor.

BALLAST QUARTERLY REVIEW 2022 X AVENUE DYSART IOWA 52224-9767 USA