

John Currin / Norman Bryson, David Eggers, and Allison Gingeras.—New York, NY: Gagosian Gallery, dist. Rizzoli International Publications, December 2006.—400 p.: ill.—ISBN 0-8478-265-4: \$150.00.



This opulent, oversized monograph weighs seven pounds and provides a thorough record of John Currin's work, starting courageously with his abstract MFA paintings of the late 1980s, through the images of middle-aged women for which he first earned his bad-boy status, and on to his Old Master nudes. Included are Currin's crude women, crudely painted, and all of his distressingly facile men. The volume also provides a history of the artist's sources and reproduces images from his sketchbooks, archives, and many works on paper.

It was a disappointment to see how meagerly the images were reproduced. Every reproduction is full-color, and there are no gutter images, but in a book this size it

seems like a waste not to reproduce each piece as large as possible. It is Currin's drawings that suffer the most from this decision, particularly his *Jackass* series (1997), in which he manipulates the faces of women in 1970s magazines to grimace and shriek at the hirsute men with whom they are partnered. The joke, already subtle, due to his clever use of gouache on the vintage pages, is nearly hidden when reproduced slightly larger than a Post-It note. I also missed greater numbers of details, which would inform the reader of Currin's processes. The inclusion of *Thanksgiving* (2003) makes this volume nearly worth the prohibitive expense, but it needs a detail of the turkey.

The texts are uneven. Occasionally, I wondered if Norman Bryson had written the bulk of his essay before deciding it was going to be about Currin. On the other hand, Allison Gingeras' essay contributed a nice base note about Currin and his work (her infamous *Artforum* advertisement may have set her up as the ideal commentator for Currin's paintings). David Eggers' short stories mimicked the queasiness of several paintings, but neither actually informed the other. What I most appreciated is Currin's own commentary included with many images. How else would we know that *Miss Omni* (1993) is an homage to Brice Marden's paintings?

Although this book is beautiful, its cost prevents it from being an essential purchase for most libraries. A fine, and more reasonably priced, alternative is the 2003 catalogue that accompanied the mid-career retrospective of Currin's work, *John Currin* (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003).

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