

Meliksetian MB Briggs

frieze

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Meg Cranston

In an ongoing series *frieze* asks curators, artists and writers to list the books that have influenced them



The Pius Book of Psalms (c.1460)

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Californian artist Meg Cranston has exhibited internationally for the past 20 years and has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a faculty research grant from the Center for Asian American Studies at UCLA. Cranston's sculptures, performances, paintings and installations often combine text and imagery from popular culture. She has recently published two books, Good Morning Evil Genius (2nd Cannons) and Hot Pants in a Cold Cold World (Artspace/clouds and JRP Ringier).

As part of my work teaching in art schools, I have written many courses on a wide variety of topics. It would be impossible to say which texts are the most important because they are all potentially important, depending on need, and needs change over time. Given that, listed below are a few classics that never seem to disappoint.

Karl Marx

The Communist Manifesto (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008; first published 1848)

The true workings of capitalism are still shocking news to students. I am considering prescribing this along with Sarah Thornton's new book *Seven Days in the Art World* (Granta, London, 2008). They might as well know now.

Friedrich Nietzsche

'The Traditional Study of Concept Mummies', from *Twilight of the Idols*, Duncan Large ed. (Oxford

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University Press, Oxford, 2008; first published 1888)

Art students love Nietzsche because he believes art is important – the supreme configuration of the will to power – the counter-movement to nihilism. He makes artists feel like they matter.

Clement Greenberg

'The Avant-Garde and Kitsch' from *Art & Culture: Critical Essays* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1992; first published 1939)

Many students suspect that crap may not be king, so it is a blessed relief to read the work of someone who can really sell the idea that kitsch is a tool of fascism.

Claire Bishop (ed.)

Participation (Whitechapel Publications, London, 2006)

The general optimism of this book, and Nicolas Bourriaud's description of relational aesthetics in particular, is a relief to many students. Many come to art school with the received notion that museums are the root of all evil. Bourriaud releases them from that idea, suggesting museums are incredibly open and mutable places. You can get away with a lot.

Le Corbusier

The City of Tomorrow and its Planning (Dover Publications, Mineola, 2000; first published 1929)
Should it come as a surprise that the traffic and the

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punishing experience of trying to walk in Los Angeles might be the result of careful planning?

Jane Jacobs

The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Random House, New York, 1961)

That Jacobs was an amateur when she wrote this book, that she is intelligent and easy to read, and that she had the courage to offer practical solutions to thorny urban problems all make this book a favourite. Students love Jane Jacobs.

John Ruskin

'The Nature of Gothic', from *The Stones of Venice* (Da Capo Press, Cambridge and New York, 2003; first published 1851-3)

This was a surprise hit. I have always loved Ruskin's writing but thought students wouldn't be able to relate. They get into the idea that Ruskin's socialism was related to his enthusiasm for the Gothic. Gothic cathedrals suddenly seem intriguing.

Michel Foucault

Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (Routledge, Oxford, 1961)

When you consider that it could easily be the case that half the students in an art class are taking prescribed psychotropic drugs, this book is a natural. When I asked one class why they were so quiet, one student told me that they were afraid that if they got too excited someone might put them on

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meds. Foucault continues to liberate.

Putting the students aside below is my own list,
subject to change.

Thomas Hirschhorn (Benjamin H.D. Buchloh et al.,
Phaidon, London, 2004)

Franz West (Robert Fleck et al., Phaidon, London,
1999)

Martin Kippenberger (Burkhard Riemschneider and
Angelika Taschen eds, Taschen, Cologne, 1991)

Gordon Walters: A Geometric Order (Workshop
Press, Auckland, 1993)

Varvara Stepanova: The Complete Work (MIT Press,
Cambridge, 1988)

Jean Dubuffet: Retrospective (Fondation Maeght,
Saint-Paul, 1985)

Alberto Giacometti (Christian Klemm, Carolyn
Lanchner, Tobia Bezzola and Anne Umland eds,
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001)

David Smith: A Centennial (Carmen Gimenez,
Rosalind Krauss and David Anfam, Guggenheim
Museum, New York, 2006)

Phillip Guston: Works on Paper (Michael Semff ed.,
Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2007)

Sol Le Witt: A Retrospective (Gary Garrells, San
Francisco Museum of Art/Yale University Press,
New Haven, 2000)

Grace Paley

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (Farrar, Straus

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& Giroux, New York, 1985)

This is my favourite book.

Samuel Beckett

Watt (Grove/Atlantic, New York, 1953)

Watt sounds like the Nicene Creed or the Gloria. The word 'and' never had more import.

Sylvia Plath

Ariel (Faber and Faber, London, 1965)

I once had a cassette tape of Plath reading from *Ariel* on a British radio programme. The words hit brutally and flat, as though she had written them with a sledgehammer. Perfect.

Tracy Emin

Strangeland (Sceptre, London, 2005)

The murky depth which Emin gives to the name of her home town of Margate and her memorable evocation of its citizens shouting 'sllaaagg' are just two of this book's many pleasures. It reminds me of Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale' (c. 1380). I wish more artists could or would write autobiographies.

Book of Psalms (King James Version)

The *Book of Psalms* has inspired several of my works. I like the way it is organized as one complaint after the other.

Mary Daly

Gyn/Ecology: The MetaEthics of Radical Feminism

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(The Women's Press, London, 1979)

I recently rediscovered the work of the radical feminist theologian and philosopher Mary Daly. At a most basic level she argues that all patriarchal religions (read also philosophies / aesthetics / governments etc.) are the same. They are patriarchal. Their god is male, and the male is god. Patriarchy is an activity (and entertainment!) involving wanton violence against living things, especially – but not limited to – human females. Patriarchy is a blood sport. Its tactics (threat, torture, monotony and war) are lethal. They replace life with death. Reform is impossible. What Hillary Clinton found out, Mary Daly (who was fired by Boston College twice) already knew: as a woman, you cannot beat them and you cannot join them. She advises readers to take that situation as a given and figure out what you are going to do in this hell.