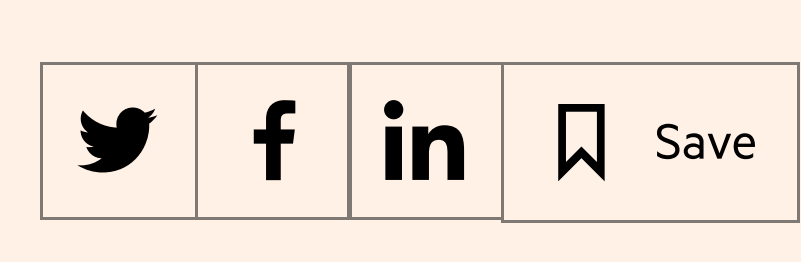


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The List: Five of the finest art magazines

A co-editor of Frieze picks out a few of the best



Jennifer Higgle SEPTEMBER 3 2011



The popular use of the word “magazine” only came into being in 1731 with the publication of the Gentleman’s Magazine; its editor thought the word’s original meaning, a “military storehouse of varied material” apt. Obviously, things have changed a lot since then; they’ve even changed in the 20 years since Frieze, which I co-edit, came into existence. To read Frieze’s earliest issues is to glimpse a time when contemporary art was cheaper than the old stuff, writers still used pens, and only bankers had mobile phones. But art magazines have always reflected their time. Here are a few of the best:

1. The Yellow Book

Published in London from 1894 until 1897, The Yellow Book featured the best writers and artists of the day, including Henry James, WB Yeats and John Singer Sargent. Aubrey Beardsley, its first art director, came up with the idea of the yellow cover; an allusion to the fact that in France books of a racy nature were wrapped in yellow paper. In The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) Oscar Wilde refers to Dorian reading “the yellow book that Lord Henry had sent him [in which] things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed” – possibly the best description ever of an art magazine.

Advertisement

2. Blast

Edited and almost entirely written by the brilliant, sinister Wyndham Lewis, Blast, the magazine of the British vorticists, lasted only two issues, in 1914 and 1915 – but what issues! With its bright pink covers and wild typography, Blast was as dazzling as it was silly and oddly moving. A typical sentence: “Curse the flabby sky that can manufacture no snow but can only drop the sea on us in a drizzle like Robert Bridges!”

3. Minotaur

Published between 1933 and 1939 in Paris, its editors were André Breton, author of the surrealist manifesto, and Pierre Mabille, a writer, surgeon and aficionado of voodoo. Picasso designed the cover of the first issue, which included contributions from Salvador Dalí and Kurt Weill, setting the tone for the magazine’s ambitions for the next six years: namely, to cover “the plastic arts, poetry, music, architecture, ethnology, mythology, spectacle, psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis”.

4. Aspen

Founded in 1965 for the jet set of Aspen, Colorado, by its third issue, Aspen was being edited by Andy Warhol and had become an art magazine, sort of. Until 1971, it was published irregularly and had a different editor for every issue; its pages were unbound and shared the box in which they came with objects as varied as do-it-yourself sculptures, records and reels of super 8 film. Probably the most fun art magazine ever produced.

5. Triple Canopy

Triple Canopy is an online magazine that comes out of New York, lets you watch videos, is not limited by word or page length, and can be read simultaneously by people anywhere in the world. In other words, it’s the future. Only thing is, you can’t read it in the bath. Yet.

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