

The New Criterion

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The Critic's Notebook

by The Editors

This week: Classical music streaming, Russian scheming & more.



Jacob Lawrence, The Architect, 1959, Egg tempera on masonite, The Studio Museum in Harlem

Nonfiction:

DAVID SATTER

The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep

RUSSIA'S ROAD TO
TERROR AND
DICTATORSHIP
UNDER YELTSIN
AND PUTIN



The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep by David Satter (Yale University Press): In September 1999, the Russian government blamed four terrorist bombings of apartments in the cities of Moscow, Buinaksk, and Volgodonsk on Islamic rebels of the Chechen Republic. The attacks ignited popular Russian support for a second war on Chechnya and propelled Vladimir Putin, the former director of Russia's hard-line Federal Security Service (FSB), to national political prominence as the successor to the faltering President Boris Yeltsin. In his 2016 book *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia's Road to Terror and Dictatorship under Yeltsin and Putin*, David Satter, an American

journalist who has covered Soviet and Russian affairs since 1976, undermines this official narrative by arguing that the attacks were not committed by Chechen insurgents but rather by the FSB itself, who Satter claims planted a false-flag operation designed to effectuate Putin's rise to power. Few journalists and academics have been willing to make such drastic accusations against Russia out of fear of political retaliation; indeed, Satter himself was expelled from Russia in 2013 for his investigative work. On the heels of this year's long-running controversy regarding Russia's interference in our own presidential election, *The Less You Know* will be newly released this week in paperback and is as relevant as ever.—AS

Art:



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Breakfast East Harlem, 2010, Pastel, The Studio Museum in Harlem

“Their Own Harlems” at The Studio Museum in Harlem (through January 7): Though he was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1917, Jacob Lawrence moved to Harlem at the age of thirteen, towards the tail end of the great social and artistic explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem was rapidly changing: Jewish and Italian populations were leaving the neighborhood while African Americans from the South arrived in unprecedented numbers. Lawrence is perhaps most well known for his visual documentation of this “Great Migration” in his 1940–41 *Migration Series*, but the vast majority of his mature work similarly depicts the New York neighborhood he chose to live in from 1930 until 1970. This summer, to celebrate the centennial of Lawrence's birth, The Studio Museum in Harlem has put on a four-month-long exhibition that examines the relationship between Lawrence's art and his urban home, and places Lawrence's work in the context of contemporary artists who have similarly responded to their Harlem homes.—AS

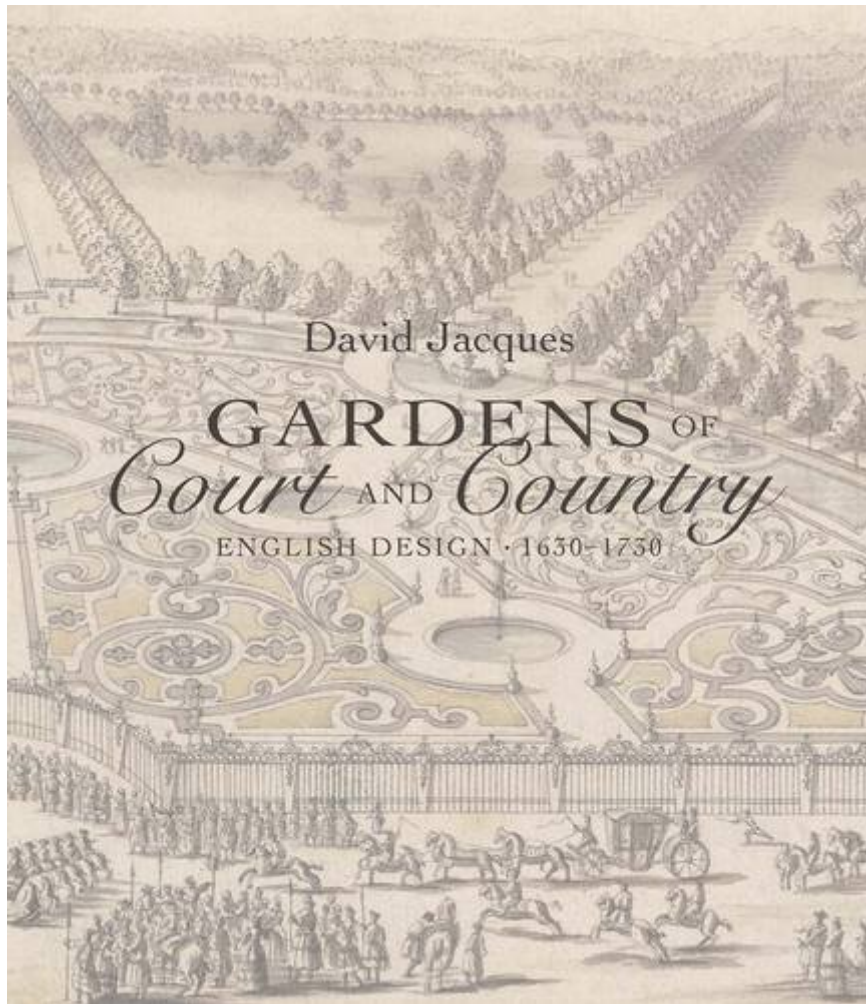
Music:



Matthias Goerne in Wozzeck. © Salzburger Festspiele / Ruth Walz

Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*, streamed live by Medici.tv (August 27): A quiet week in New York means an opportunity to watch some of Europe's greatest festivals from afar. On Sunday, the Salzburg Festival—where our own Jay Nordlinger has been camped out for several weeks now—will present Berg's dark masterpiece *Wozzeck*, streamed live on Medici.tv. Matthias Goerne takes on the title role in this disturbing modern classic, with Vladimir Jurowski conducting.—ECS

Gardens:



Gardens of Court and Country: English Design 1630–1730 by David Jacques (Yale University Press): The story of the rise of the English landscape garden has changed little in nearly 250 years. The rough outlines were sketched by Horace Walpole in his 1780 essay “On Modern Gardening” and have been bequeathed nearly intact to every subsequent generation: English gardens before William Kent and Capability Brown were foreign trifles, devoid of any awareness of setting. According to Walpole, it was those two eighteenth-century visionaries who were first able, in the words of Alexander Pope, to “consult the genius of the place,” and free English gardens from the tyranny of the formal Dutch parterre model. While modern scholars like John Dixon Hunt and Stephen Bending have done much to correct this received wisdom, Walpole’s narrative still reigns. David Jacques’s *Gardens of Court and Country* is therefore a welcome entrant into the field of garden history. The richly illustrated and well-researched book contextualizes the period directly preceding that of the rise of the English landscape garden, detailing the evolution of formal garden spaces as well as the understudied survival of formal gardens well into the second half of the eighteenth century. Scholarly but still highly readable, Jacques’s book will serve as a valuable reference for those interested in academic garden history and an enlightening coffee-table book for those not.—BR

From the archive: “Criticism after art” by James Panero (December 2005). On a discussion from the Art

Institute of Chicago on art criticism, and on encountering the critic Dave Hickey.

From the current issue: “Art in conversation” by Philippe de Montebello. On museums as havens for culture.

Broadcast: Roger Kimball: The Grim Future of Statism.

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