

The New Criterion

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The Critic's Notebook

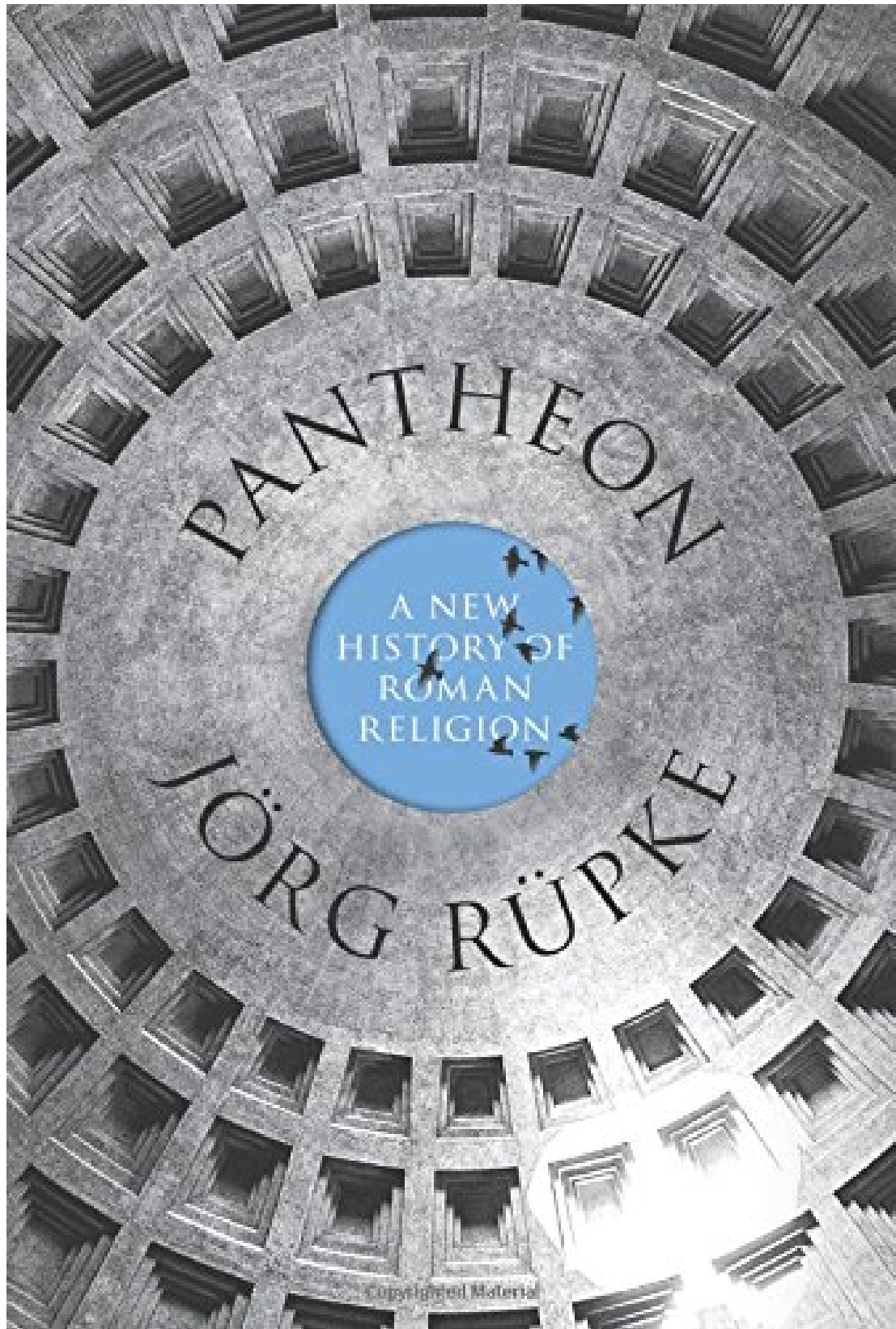
by The Editors

This week: Roman religion, Jasper Johns, medieval time & more.



Installation view of "Jasper Johns: 'Something Resembling Truth'" at The Broad.

Nonfiction:



Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion, by Jörg Rüpke (Princeton University Press): Religion—what is it? The word itself has a clue that, for those of us marinated in the afterglow of Christendom, may seem strange. The Latin verb *religo*—to bind, to make fast—reminds us that a religion is much more than a set of doctrines, more even than an institution to which we may “belong” or with which we may claim some filiation. The great German scholar Jörg Rüpke exploits this more capacious meaning of “religion” in this newly translated summa of his work in comparative

religion, *Pantheon: A New History of Roman Religion*. Taking the reader from bronze-age ritual practices, reconstructed through extrapolation from various archeological evidences, through the thoroughly Christianized fourth century AD, Rüpke traces the astonishing diversity of religious practice—worship, ritual, discipline, and community affirmation—that grew up in ancient Rome and, later, throughout the Mediterranean. Religion, Rüpke shows, was not so much something one did, but something one was: a permeating force inseparable from the identity of a community and its members. This fresh, original, and deeply learned study is part compendium, part reference work. It is a rich stew that the author has concocted but made palatable by the narrative force of his treatment. “‘Hey, you,’ . . .” he observes, “is more effective than ‘I should like to say . . .’” when addressing the deity. “Categorizations of classic Religious Studies texts,” he notes, “give a quite false impression.” Despite its length and erudition, this is a book that anyone interested in the development of Roman religion and its many offshoots and cross currents will read with profit. —RK

Art:



Installation view of “Jasper Johns: ‘Something Resembling Truth’” at The Broad.

“Jasper Johns: ‘Something Resembling Truth’” at The Broad (through March 13): Rendered in gray or embalmed in wax, the paintings of Jasper Johns have long been the Charon ship delivering us to the afterlife of modern art. Now buried in that architectural ossuary known as The Broad, Eli Broad’s museum of his own collection in downtown Los Angeles, “Jasper Johns: ‘Something Resembling Truth’” surveys the octogenarian’s long career and positions his neo-Dada body of work as the foundation for much contemporary art, exemplified by Broad’s own deadpan collection on display a floor above. —JP

Theater:



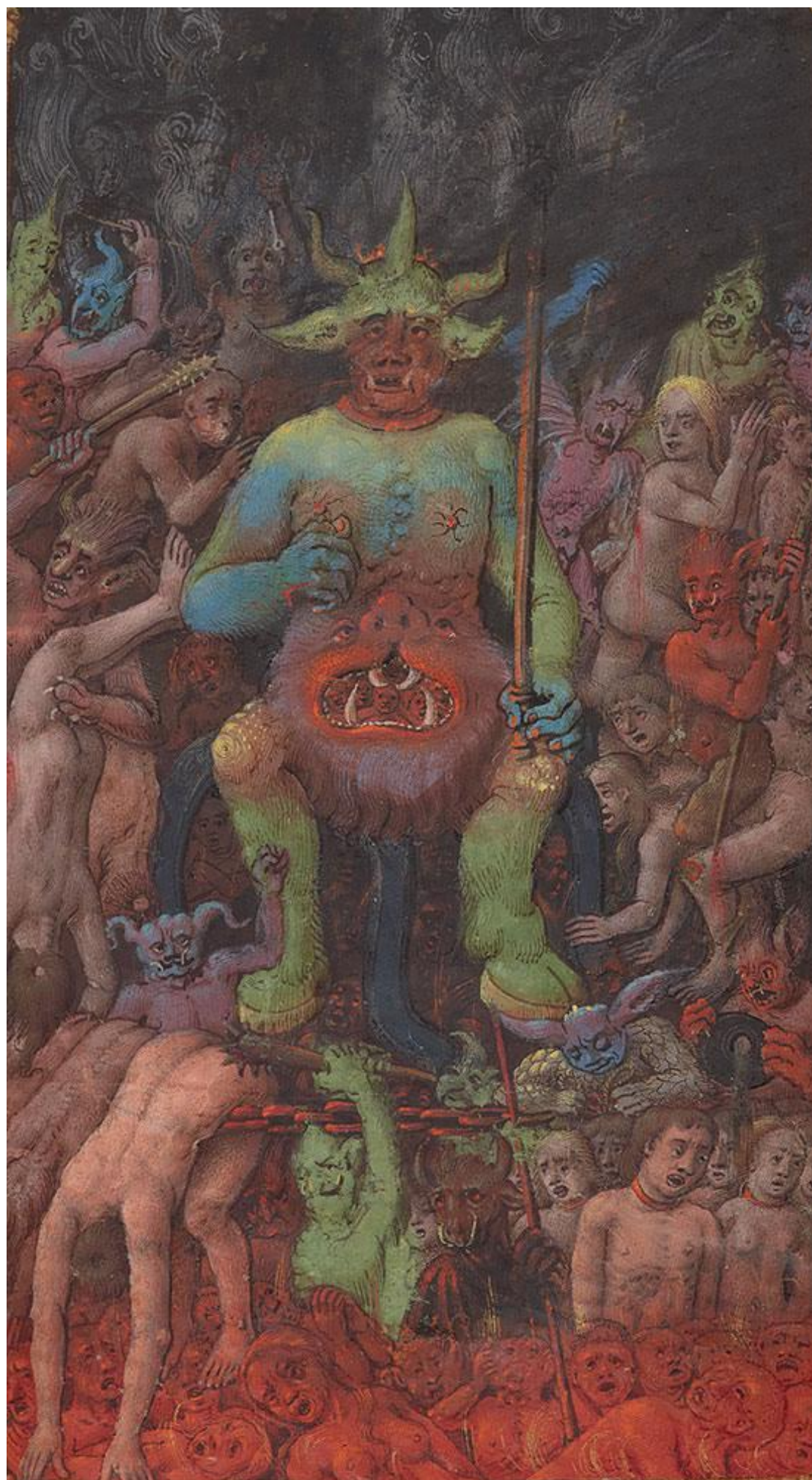
Julius Caesar, by Old Hat Theatre Company (February 15–March 3): I've written before about Old Hat Theatre Company, a young classical drama troupe operating out of Park Slope. Like many fledgling theater companies, they operate with severely limited resources, but few have such strong acting and directing talent to draw on as this one. Old Hat's main ambition is to create text-first productions heavy on substance but light enough on physical trappings to be performed in rep at multiple venues. Their latest project, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, opens this week at Access Theater NYC in Tribeca, before transferring to South Oxford Space near Atlantic Terminal. —ECS

Music:



Christoph Prégardien and Julius Drake at the 92nd Street Y (February 16): As I discussed with Jay Nordlinger in our spring preview podcast, Schubert is everywhere on this season's calendar, even without any apparent anniversary—every year is a Schubert year. This Friday at the 92nd Street Y, the tenor Christoph Prégardien is joined by Julius Drake, one of today's greatest lieder accompanists, for a performance of *Winterreise*. I've said it many times before, but it bears repeating: this cycle is one of the greatest achievements in the history of music, rich with emotion, a perfect marriage of music and poetry. It is worth a place in one's datebook any time it's being performed. —ECS

Other:



Master of Petrarch's Triumphs, Damnation (from the Hours of Claude Molé), ca. 1500, Morgan Library & Museum.

“Now and Forever: The Art of Medieval Time,” at the Morgan Library (through April 29): While time may be mostly demystified for us moderns—quartz watches and digital timekeeping assure us of exactitude—the concept of time was less certain in the middle ages. To drive home this point, the Morgan has assembled a varied cache of timekeeping objects, on display through April 29. From books of hours to astrolabes to family trees, the Morgan’s new exhibition displays various time-related objects and the lengths medieval people went to decorate their timekeeping aids. —BR



Jackson Pollock, Alchemy, 1947, Oil, aluminum, alkyd enamel paint with sand, pebbles, fibers, and wood on commercially printed fabric, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

From the archive: “Jackson Pollock & the New York School, II,” by Hilton Kramer (February 1999). The second part of an examination of the artist’s place in the modernist tradition.

From the current issue: “Puttin’ on the style,” by Dominic Green. On writing, and on English style.

Broadcast: Classical music spring preview with Eric C. Simpson and Jay Nordlinger

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