

The New Criterion

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Week in review

by Isaac Sligh

Recent links of note:

“A farewell to boredom – at Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara”

Thomas Marks, *Apollo*

I have only spent an hour in Ferrara, Italy, during a change between trains on the way to see the treasures that lie in nearby Ravenna. In that short time I took a brief stroll through the twentieth-century sprawl that surrounds the train station; it was pleasant enough, but beyond the sudden rise of the town’s 1932 *acquedotto*, nothing to grab the eye. Having read Thomas Marks’s article in *Apollo*, I now know that next time I will have to pay a visit to Ferrara’s medieval old town, the haunt of Italy’s storied Este family and the location of their newly restored pleasure palace, the Palazzo Schifanoia. Read on for a description of the fifteenth-century frescoes and paintings that decorate its walls, including the fascinating story of the palazzo’s zodiac fresco, a longtime puzzle deciphered in the last century by scholars to show the influence of Ancient Greek symbols transferred to Indian and Persian astrologers and then broadcast back via the Italian humanist Pellegrino Prisciani.

“The eyes have it”

Eric Gibson, *The Spectator*

Readers of Tom Wolfe’s *The Painted Word* may recall that Leo Steinberg was one of the three “kings of Cultureburg” (along with Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg) whose high-flying theories held, in Wolfe’s opinion, a vise-like grip on the world of contemporary art criticism. As Steinberg grew older, however, his interest turned away from modern criticism and more towards scholarly considerations of Renaissance artists, particularly Michaelangelo. As Eric Gibson wrote for *The New Criterion* last year, Steinberg was one of the few writers who straddled the divide between the supposedly objective, fact-based realm of art history and the subjective realm of art criticism; he had no qualms about mixing the two at will. Now, as the notoriously perfectionist Steinberg’s unpublished legacy continues to see the light of day, Gibson returns for a review in *The Spectator* of a new collection of Steinberg’s essays on Renaissance and Baroque Art.

“Teach What You Love”

Mark Edmundson, *The American Scholar*

I can still recall the blank stares I received during an academic interview in which I mentioned “love” as my main motivation for studying the subject at hand. Refusing to pander to negative critical trends is a hard row to hoe. This was in the back of my mind as I read the University of Virginia professor Mark Edmundson’s defense of fostering a love of literature in the classroom instead of “deconstructing” the fun out of the whole affair. Edmundson’s argument may sound obvious, but as anyone with recent experience in academia will know, it is, unfortunately, a novel proposition.

Podcasts:

“Music for a While #34: ‘Twelve, sixteen, and other ages’”

Jay Nordlinger, *The New Criterion’s music critic, talks music—but, more important, plays music.*

Dispatch:

“The Irascibles,” by Peter Malone. *A review of the catalogue of “The Irascibles: Painters Against the Museum, New York, 1950.”*

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