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The Critic’s Notebook

by The Editors

Sign up to receive “Critic’s Notebook” in your inbox every week—it only takes a few seconds and it's completely free! “Critic’s Notebook” is a weekly preview of the best to read, see, and hear in New York and beyond, compiled by the editors of The New Criterion.

This week: The northern shore & a timeless war

Nonfiction:
When a solar eclipse in 1919 provided proof for Einstein’s young theory of general relativity, The New York Times announced the development with an unrestrained sense of wonder. “LIGHTS ALL ASKEW IN THE HEAVENS,” proclaimed the headline, adding that physicists were “more or less agog” to see their orderly Newtonian understanding of the universe undermined in one fell swoop. In Painting 1909, the art historian Leonard Folgarait describes how that sense of uncertainty pervaded every dimension of early twentieth-century life, with the shuffling of stars in the sky mirrored by the shuffling of forms and faces in Post-Impressionist painting. At just 240 pages, the book makes its case through the examples of a few visionaries who both produced and captured the wonder of the day with their work.—MU

Art:
“Marsden Hartley’s Maine” at the Met Breuer (through June 18): Modernism and regionalism, two seemingly opposing forces in twentieth-century art, came together in the paintings of Marsden Hartley (1877–1943). This is the premise of “Marsden Hartley’s Maine,” a haunting if narrow exhibition now on view at the Met Breuer and a homecoming of its own for the American master. This is the first, and long overdue, Hartley survey in New York since 1980, when his work filled these same gallery walls in what was then the Whitney Museum. For this “painter from Maine”—as Hartley declared himself to be after a lifetime of wandering—homelessness and homecoming became interwoven with the same modernist thread. Mixing the innovations of European modernism with the vernaculars of American craft, Hartley sought to go beyond mere appearances by transforming his impressions into felt objects. He reached for a place of belonging in his art even as he never quite attained it in his life. To be sure, the limited focus of this survey gives us “Maine” without the full richness of Hartley. At the same time, the questions that such a focused exhibition can raise may be lost in a broader survey—and, at the very least, “Marsden Hartley’s Maine” means Marsden Hartley is back in New York. Look for Karen Wilkin on Hartley in a forthcoming issue of The New Criterion. Here is my review in last week’s Wall Street Journal. —JP

Music:
**Otello performed by LoftOpera at LightSpace Studios (through March 27):** Verdi’s *Otello* occupies a deservedly exalted place in the operatic literature. Marrying some of the Italian master’s most gorgeous music with a powerful Shakespearean tragedy, the piece approaches the pinnacle of what the genre can achieve. Less known is Rossini’s own mellifluous take on the subject, but it gets a rare dusting-off this week thanks to an ongoing production by LoftOpera, the exciting young company presenting operatic performances in hip Brooklyn venues. Performed in LightSpace Studios in Bushwick, *Otello* features Bernard Holcomb in the title role, opposite the Desdemona of Cecilia Lopez and the Iago of Blake Friedman. Sean Kelly conducts. —ECS

**Other:**

*Philipp Foltz, Pericles’ Funeral Oration, 1852.*
“The Plague of War: Athens, Sparta, and the Struggle for Greece” at the 92nd Street Y (March 24): In his New History of the Peloponnesian War, Donald Kagan recorded the Greek historian Thucydides as having written for “such men as might wish to see clearly what has happened, and will happen again.” Lecturing on March 24 at the 92nd Street Y, the Plague of War author Jennifer T. Roberts will address the endless relevance of the great Greek war to which Thucydides alluded. Roberts’s remarks will cover the stark carnage of the conflict between Athens and Sparta, but also the ill-fated alliance between the two city-states that devolved into war—a lesson about the fragility of order that should strike a familiar chord in modern ears. —MU


From the current issue: “The Massachusetts Machiavel,” by Justin Zaremby: On The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson by Bernard Bailyn.

Broadcast: Conserving Kahn: The architect George Knight describes the vision and process behind his firm’s renovation of the Yale Center for British Art.

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